Terrology – the Guide to Precode Horror comics, was the brainchild of George Suarez, who did an excellent job of detailing all of the smaller publishers of horror comics.

These articles appeared as part of "Tales Too Terrible to Tell", published by New England Comics Press in 1989-1993. They've been scanned from my personal collection.

Alas, even after 99 pages, George never got to finish his magnum opus. He never got to Atlas, EC or DC. But they are better documented.

I have looked in vain for signs of its publication as a book without success, so I have made my own.

George Suarez, wherever you are, thanks for all of this. It proved to be an excellent guide for collecting precode horror.

DerMahrk

9/5/2025

TERROLOGY™

NEW ENGLAND COMICS PRESS

The Guide to Pre-Code Horror Comics!

SUGGESTED FOR MATURE READERS

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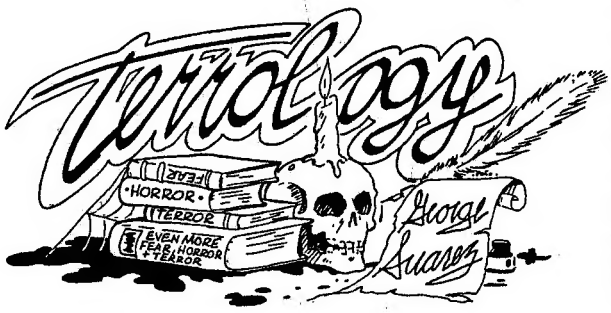


Chapter One: *In the Beginning...*

Tales Too Terrible To Tell, as a title, is a self-contradiction as well as an alliteration. After all, we are *telling* these tales, aren't we? And they really aren't all that terrible by the contemporary standards of an audience accustomed to movies like *Friday the 13th* and books like those of Stephen King. **TTTTT** has been published by NEC for fun and as a tribute to a comic book genre beloved by a select circle of fans but only just recently becoming known to the comic-collecting masses: the *Pre-Code Horror Comics* of the 1950's.

Terrology is the name of an Index/Collector's Guide to these comics which will be written by me and published by NEC sometime in the next couple of years. This book will be a complete and detailed review of every horror comic published prior to the advent of the Comics Code in 1955. *Terrology* will be compiled via direct access to copies of every such comic and will, I hope, include hundreds of full color cover repros as well as representative interior art. This work will be intended as a "scholarly" examination of an important period in the history of the development of the comic book. While accessible by all, *Terrology* will be specifically targeted toward the serious collector/fan of *Pre-Code Horror*. In the meantime, while **TTTTT** comes out every three months or so, *Terrology* will appear as the title of a column in which I will attempt to provide the general comic reader with some basic background and information about the fascinating world of 1950's *Horror Comics*.

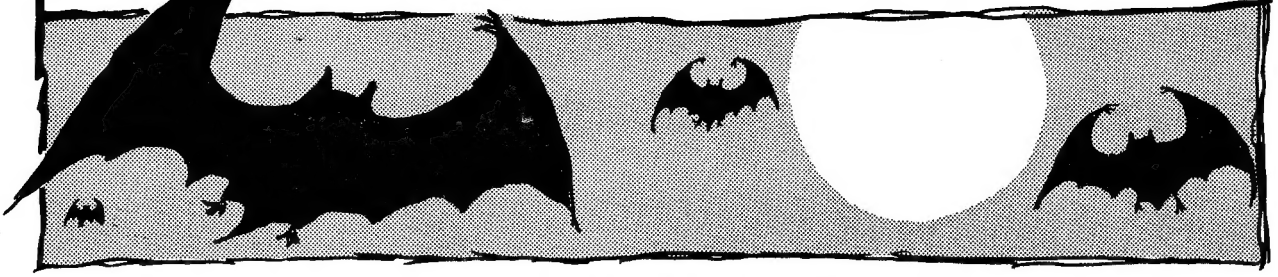
The stories in **TTTTT** (except **The Tick** tale, of course) have been reproduced from original art purchased by me at comic conventions over the last few years. Fortunately, a fair amount of such artwork survived the collapse of many comic publishers in the mid-1950s. The stories presented were originally published in comic books with titles like **Weird Mysteries, Mister Mystery, Weird Chills** and **Strange Mysteries**. Our legal research indicates that all these stories are now in the public domain. This is why we've reproduced them here. NEC Press is interested in providing recognition of artistic credits for these stories. Anyone with such information, or anyone with direct involvement with their actual production is encouraged to contact us. We are also interested in talking to anyone who has original art from 1950's horror comics. While we plan to include a greater number of original stories in future issues of **TTTTT**, we can always make use of more *printable* reprint stuff!

Are these stories *typical* of what was published during the heyday of horror in the middle of this century? Probably. Like in almost any field of endeavor, the average product was of pretty *average* quality. Certainly, companies like EC, Avon, St. John, Standard, Charlton, Atlas and others produced some super work by masters like Jack Davis, Graham Ingels, Alex Toth, Joe Kubert, Bob Powell, Reed Crandall, Basil Wolverton, Bill Everett, Matt Baker, Howard Nostrand, A. C. Hollingsworth, George Roussos, Johny Craig, Steve Ditko, Lou Cameron, Bernie Krigstein, Bill Benulis and many more. If we obtain such artwork, and work out the legalities involved, we hope to present examples of the very best of *1950's Horror* in future issues of **TTTTT**. In the meantime, this column will attempt to give you a taste of the variety of horror comics produced in the 1950's.

What fascinates me *most* about this era in the history of comics is the phenomenal explosion in popularity of a brand-new comic book genre. In the five years between January 1950 and January 1955, over two dozen companies produced **2500** different comics scattered across more than a hundred titles. This averages 40 different horror comics per month. During the peak years of 1953 and 1954, the typical monthly output approached 80-100 different magazines *every thirty days!* This is more than the average output of the *entire* comics industry today. **JUST IN HORROR COMICS!** Don't forget that while horror comics were very popular in 1953, the newsstands were also heavily stocked with crime comics, romance comics, war comics, western comics, teen humor comics, funny animal comics, super-hero comics and a large variety of "other" types. However, the horror comic genre dominated the marketplace and virtually every publisher except Dell (Donald Duck & Co.) responded to the immense demand by adding a horror title to its lineup.

However, the horror comic genre contained the seed of its own demise. With such an immense number of publications appearing monthly, it was inevitable that the all-consuming demand for new product drained writers and artists of plots and ideas and resulted in the substitution of excessive gore and uncontrolled shock effects for originality in their work. The result was national outrage directed against comics publishers fueled by the publication of a controversial book, **Seduction of the Innocent**, by a psychiatrist, Dr. Fredric Wertham, which purported to demonstrate that crime and horror comics contributed to juvenile delinquency among youngsters. The comics publishers, threatened with government control, responded by "voluntarily" creating a self-censorship organization, the *Comics Code Authority*, whose first act was to issue standards which effectively eliminated horror comics. The comics industry was assailed by the resulting negative publicity and many publishers, completely dependent upon their lines of horror and crime comics for survival, folded up. The *Comics Code Authority* still exists today although its influence is negligible at best and Marvel, the number one publisher in the business, didn't even bother for a time to present the *Comics Code* seal of approval on its covers. Back in 1955, the only way to get a comic book to the newsstand was to display the seal *very* prominently. In fact, publishers who were notorious past offenders, like EC, failed to get their comics distributed even when they did bear the seal. So ended, for better or for worse, a fascinating era in the history of comics.

So when did the horror comics phenomenon begin? A definitive answer depends upon one's *definition* of "horror comic."



Horror as an aspect of comic book story-telling can be traced all the way back to the birth of the comic book medium itself. In the 1940's, even patriotic characters like Captain America and Captain Marvel regularly confronted mad Nazi doctors and insane Japanese scientists whose stock in trade was the eerie and frightful. Characters like Doctor Occult and Fu Manchu in the "pre-hero" DC's of the 1930's relied much upon such themes in attracting readers. The pulp magazines which preceded comic books, and from which the new medium drew much of its creative force, were notorious for their exploitation of the horrific and the terrific in their stories. These magazines can trace their thematic roots to the works of "classic" writers like Edgar Allan Poe, Jules Verne, Bram Stoker, the Marquis de Sade and even William Shakespeare!

In attempting to answer the question of the origin of horror comics, we must first define the term. I've grappled with the need for such a definition for some time now and present this one for your consideration. My definition of a horror comic has *three* parts.

DEFINITION: A "HORROR COMIC"

A "*horror comic*" is a comic book meeting the following three requirements:

(1) The horror comic contains exclusively or predominantly a story or stories whose primary purpose is to *scare, shock* and/or *fascinate* the reader.

(2) The stories involved in the horror comic achieve the purpose described in Part (1) by using plot elements involving *the supernatural, the macabre* and/or *the evil side of human nature.*

(3) The stories involved cannot be more accurately described as *science fiction, crime, jungle, super-hero* or *humor* stories.

The three parts of this definition require explanation. Some of the stipulations may strike you as *odd;* the definition is specifically designed to eliminate confusion arising from the many "hybrid" genres which flowered in the 1950's.

(1) is easy to understand. Horror comics are supposed to scare or shock you! An anthology type comic containing one horror story among many others is *NOT* a horror comic. On the other hand, a comic book containing one super-hero story along with several horror stories might be considered a true horror comic. (Timely's transition issue of **Captain America,** the quite scarce #74, subtitled **"Weird Tales"** comes immediately to mind.) "Fascinate" covers the case of the "tamer" titles (like DC's **House of Mystery** or ACG's **Forbidden Worlds**) which were unlikely to shock or scare any reader beyond the age of six but which were designed to appeal to the reader's sense of the fantastic and wondrous. (Whether this was a conscious attempt by the creators involved and whether they ever came close to achieving this effect are questions I won't address at this time!)

(2) requires a little more *clarification. "The supernatural"* is the realm of extra-wordly phenomena. This covers your ghosts, vampires and assorted monsters, your curses, incantations and other (real) magic and all the other trappings which can't be explained by textbook science. However, not all horror stories are dependent upon supernatural elements. *"The macabre"*, as I define it, covers classic plot elements like deserted graveyards, creepy houses, murky swamps, eerie mountainsides, dark forests, mysterious inns, wizened old men, predatory scheming women, mentally deranged children, (fake) magic and magicians and much, much more. Some of the best horror stories ever written have depended exclusively upon such completely "natural" devices. (Remember the first time you saw *"Psycho"?* Hard to believe there was nothing supernatural or otherwise inexplicable in that movie, eh?) *"The evil side of human nature"* applies to horror stories dependent upon criminality for their effect. Some of these comics may arguably be classified as crime comics. (Titles like Story's **Fight Against Crime** and Ribage's **Crime Smashers** are on the borderline of both genres.)

(3) is specifically designed to exclude numerous 1950's titles which contained many of the elements of horror comics described in Parts (1) and (2) but which were self-evidently NOT horror comics. Comics like Star's **Terrors of the Jungle** and **Terrifying Tales** even had horrific titles but these were clearly jungle stories disguised with the trappings of horror. Atlas titles like **Astonishing, Journey into Unknown Worlds** and **Space Squadron** walked a fine line between horror and science fiction. Some early issues of EC's **Mad** had horrific Kurtzman covers but they were clearly intended to be humorous parodies of horror cliches. Part (3) of my definition allows me to re-classify comics which simply don't deserve to be called horror comics into other genres. Sure, it's possible such reclassifications might be considered arbitrary. But it's my definition, so I guess it's fair that I get to write the rules!

Most importantly, the above definition excludes all comics which would be better classed as super-hero comics. This eliminates the output of golden age publishers like Timely, Fox, Fiction House, Centaur, Quality, MLJ and others who published stories about super-heroes in constant combat with sinister scientists, insane killers and other horrific villains and bad guys. To be honest, this is a big *relief* for me. As a collector of horror comics, I feel obligated to buy every example of the genre and I can live without having to search for hundreds of very expensive comics from the golden age!

Armed with my above definition, I feel prepared to offer the following chronology of the birth and infancy of the horror comic. The end of World War II may be considered one of the many factors influencing the development of the horror comic. Up until the War ended in mid-1945, comic book readers were enthralled by the adventures of super-humans, most of whom were fighting the forces of Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy and Imperial Japan. The end of the War caught many of these superheroes (and their publishers) by surprise, it would seem. With the dictators and their colorful underlings vanquished, superbeings like Captain America and Captain Marvel were left to flex their mighty muscles against ordinary gangsters and minor local menaces. This gets tedious *real fast!* The result was that

the super-hero genre went into a real tailspin beginning in late 1945. By 1947, many dozens of super-hero titles had been cancelled. Marvel's entire lineup was gone as such heavy hitters as **Cap,** the **Human Torch** and the **Sub-Mariner** went into comic limbo. Shortly thereafter, DC's huge cast of *"All-Stars"* was reduced to the big three: **Superman, Batman and Wonder Woman.**

The surviving comics publishers began experimenting with *alternative* subject matter for comic books. The years between 1946 and 1949 are fascinating for the breadth, if not the quantity, of their comic output. Publishers introduced subject matters like romance, western, crime, espionage, adventure, exploration, teen humor, funny animal, comedy and many other themes into the comic book medium. Strange anthology comics came into being which included under the same covers the silly antics of anthropomorphic cartoon characters alongside "serious" crime dramas and fantastic quasi-super-hero adventures. It seems inevitable that the search for a successful subject to replace super-heroes in the comics medium would lead inexorably to the development of the horror comic. That development is outlined chronologically below.

(0) Early 1946:
Levy's YELLOWJACKET #7 & #8

These publications do not meet the definition of "horror comic" presented earlier. **Yellowjacket** was one of those super-hero/anthology titles mentioned above and it ran eight issues in the late '40s. The last two installments of the title contained a short horror story narrated by a creepy old witch "host" type character in a feature entitled *"Tales of Terror"*. The striking similarity between this feature and the Old Witch host and **Tales of Terror** title introduced four years later by the ultimate horror publisher, EC Publications, requires me to mention these obscure comics as the primordial root of *Pre-Code Horror.* Continuing research may uncover even more primitive antecedents. Anyone out there know of any?

(1) Late 1946:
Avon's EERIE #1

This is the *first* **horror comic book**—by my definition. It was also one of the publisher's first comic publications. Avon was a well-known publisher of fantasy and potboiler paperbacks and the company later successfully adapted many of their books into comic editions. **Eerie** was a "one-shot" (only one issue published); Avon adapted many of their paperbacks into one-shot comic book form. However, **Eerie** was probably not intended as a one-shot since the indicia mentions quarterly publication. This implies that the reception to **Eerie #1** was not warm; perhaps Avon was a bit premature in publishing a horror comic one year after World War II had ended to sell to youngsters addicted to Nazi-fighting supermen! The cover of **Eerie #1** remains, in my opinion, one of the best horror comic covers of all time in its depiction of a beautiful, exotic woman (bound, of course, to be consistent with Avon's paperback tradition) about to be menaced by a very non-sterotypical knife-wielding vampire. What makes the cover particularly striking is that the company, as a brand-new comics publisher, had no tradition or history in comic book cover design and therefore came up with something very novel and startling. Avon revived the **Eerie** title with a new #1 in 1951 and ran it successfully for 17 issues but this later incarnation was simply not as---well---*eerie,* as its predecessor!

(2) Mid-1948
ACG's Adventures into the Unknown #1

This is the first *continuing* horror comic. In fact, it "continued" for quite a long while: 61 pre-Code issues along with 113 post-Code issues for a grand total of 174 comics! **AitU** didn't go belly-up until mid-1967. The American Comic Group survived the advent of the *Comics Code* because the company's output was exceedingly *tame* by 1950's horror comic standards. In fact, ACG's rather insipid letter columns would specifically criticize the output of more extreme (and more interesting) publishers like EC. Interestingly, ACG tested the waters of extremism in horror with a one-shot title called **The Clutching Hand** in 1954. This title had all the superficial shock value and graphic gore characterizing EC without possessing any of the style and sophistication which made EC so memorable. Even though any fool could recognize the ACG color scheme, cover design and interior style in **The Clutching Hand,** the publisher cautiously omitted any mention of its company name in the comic. Apparently the response wasn't impressive as the title lasted but one issue.

ACG's most impressive horror output was its earliest. The covers of the first fifteen issues of **Adventures into the Unknown** bear well-done depictions of moody crypts, creepy skeleton islands, terrifying monsters and terrified victims. Some were drawn by Al Feldstein, who later contributed greatly to the success of EC. By 1952, ACG had settled into a rut of boring, cartoony covers and tedious, uninteresting and unenthusiastically produced stories. Their letter columns are some of the best cures for insomnia I've ever found. ACG tried hard and was the second most prolific publisher of *Pre-Code Horror* (after Atlas), but I can't help feeling that it is philosophically unjust for this company to be credited with the first continuing horror comic.

(3) Mid-1948
EC's MOON GIRL #5

This comic is NOT a horror comic but it does contains the first horror story by EC Publications, the legendary producer of the very best horror comics of the era; indeed, of some of the best comics printed up to this very day. EC's first full horror comic, **Crypt of Terror #17,** is discussed below. **CoT #17** began what EC called the *"New Trend"* in comics. The folks at EC clearly understood the significance of the popularity of this new genre among comic readers and the company was the only comics publisher specifically to refer to and to define this trend in print. EC had existed for several years prior to the start of the *New Trend* and its output in those days is known as *"Pre-Trend."* In the *Pre-Trend* days, EC experimented with a unspectacular hodgepodge of western, crime, romance, humor and psuedo-super-hero comics. **Moon Girl** was an example of the last. In the course of these experiments, EC repeatedly dabbled in horror. In **Moon Girl #4** the super-heroine is pitted against a vampire. *"Zombie Terror"* in #5 is the first "real" horror story from EC in that the Moon Girl character does not make an appearance. Experimental EC horror stories also appeared in the last two issues of the crime comics **War Against Crime** and **Crime Patrol** in late 1949. At this point EC had finally determined that horror was selling and selling *big,* and these two were retitled and converted into horror titles: the legendary **Crypt of Terror** and **Vault of Horror.**

(4) Early 1949
Atlas' AMAZING MYSTERIES #32

This title was a continuation of the golden age **Sub-Mariner** title. Atlas was the publishing name Marvel Comics went under in the 1950's---after having been known as Timely in the 1940's. This is Marvel/Atlas' first horror comic—which is fairly significant since Atlas was far and away the most prolific producer of *Pre-Code Horror* in the 1950's. For reasons unknown, **Amazing Mysteries** ran only two issues as a horror comic, was converted into a crime comic for two more installments, and then it was cancelled. Atlas cancelled, revived and transformed lots of its titles in these days and the motivations for such machinations are lost in the mists of time. Eventually Atlas must have determined that both crime and horror were profitable as the publisher revived its entire line by exploiting these two subjects heavily. The estimable golden age title **Marvel Mystery** was converted to horror and renamed **Marvel Tales** with #93 (mid-1949) and even the last two issues of the golden age **Captain America** title were transformed into horror comics in late 1949. Issues #74 & #75 were known as **Captain America's Weird Tales** and Cap suffered the ultimate indignity of being ejected completely out of his own title in the latter issue! As the **Human Torch's** title had become **Love Tales** with #36, the massacre of the golden age Marvel super-heros became complete! Atlas' lineup of horror, crime, western, war, romance and teen humor titles were tremendously successful in the early 1950's. One has to consider whether Atlas would ever have returned to super-heroes if it had been allowed to continue exploiting these subjects indefinitely. I'll leave it to modern Marvel fans to muse over whether the coming of the much-maligned *Comics Code* may be credited with the re-birth of the Marvel super-heroes fans know and love today!

© 1949 Comic Combine Corp. Renewed 1977.

Crypt-Keeper © 1950 E.C. Comics.

(5) Early 1950
EC's CRYPT OF TERROR #17

Vault of Horror #12 came out the same month but in the "cycle" EC maintained, I believe **Crypt** always preceded **Vault.** (Both these titles bore issue numbers continued from predecessory non-horror comics.) **Crypt of Terror** marks the birth of EC horror, an event of *transcendent* importance as far as serious fans of comics are concerned. EC's legendary reputation among comic readers is well-deserved. This company published more quality work in the all-too-brief four years of its "reign" as the premier comic publisher of the era than much larger companies came close to generating over decades of production. EC was the first publisher to challenge its readers with sophisticated, non-juvenile fare. It was the first to offer non-trivial letter columns, to deal with serious issues like racism, religious discrimination, drugs, the waste of war and the problem of juvenile delinquency and the first to foster an intimacy of sorts between the people who produced the comics and those who read them. While the company's horror comics were less socially conscious and more exploitative than its science fiction, shock and war titles, EC's excellence here was still very evident. EC's horror comics can be easily distinguished from the mass output of every single competing publisher by three key factors:

(1) EC had the *best* writers and artists in the business. While the writers would sometimes succumb to formula plots, even their worst efforts were better than most of the competitor's best, because they were superior in the relating even of a formula story. EC artwork remains some of the best ever put on paper in comic book form. In my continuing efforts to rank the twenty best *Pre-Code Horror* stories, I find it supremely difficult to select fewer than 12 EC stories. Impressive considering that EC produced less than 3% of all horror comics printed in the 1950's!

(2) EC had a *rapport* with the reader unmatched by an other publisher. EC readers knew the names of every artist. While most other publishers had a policy of not allowing artists to sign their work, EC included credits in every letter column and ran

full-page "*Meet The Artist*" features in their comics. Through the letter columns and EC-sponsored fan clubs, readers were able to develop a strong attachment to the people at EC as "friends." (You may see an element of this approach to marketing in everything we do at New England Comics. *Hey,* we don't deny the influence!)

(3) EC was the only horror publisher to maintain an element of *levity* in its publications. Reading an EC horror story was like being told a creepy story by a friend. Sure, it might be really frightening, but you knew the person telling the story wasn't trying to terrify you in a nasty way. This intimacy was fostered by EC's three horror "hosts": *The Crypt-Keeper, The Vault-Keeper* and *The Old Witch.* Each host had his own title and made "guest" appearances in the other two. The hosts virtually never appeared "in" the stories, but they related the tales, interrupted them occasionally with wisecracks, and always appeared at the finish to relate a sarcastic or punnish "moral." The hosts were there to remind the reader that these horror tales, as gruesome and frightening as they are, were stories and nothing more. When EC introduced its three horror titles and their hosts, the horror comics "steamroller" of the 1950's began to really roll.

An interesting aside: EC feared that the title **Crypt of Terror** was a bit extreme and with the fourth issue, #20, renamed the comic **Tales from the Crypt.** This was a major title change since it broke the symmetry maintained by EC's three horror comics: **Crypt of Terror, Vault of Horror** and **Haunt of Fear.** Apparently, EC's editors were concerned that the word **"Terror"** was particularly graphic and offensive and might cause them trouble with news vendors and parents. It's hard at this point to understand why **"Terror"** was considered much more troublesome than **"Horror"** or the **"Weird"** designation appearing on EC's two science fiction titles, **Weird Fantasy** and **Weird Science.** Particularly when **Tales from the Crypt** continued to display **"Terror"** boldly on its sidebar. All three words, along with **"Crime"**, were specifically banned from display on a comic book cover five years later by the new *Comics Code Authority.*

Next issue, we'll discuss the growth and development of the horror comic phenomenon, and the factors leading to the problems which gave birth to the *Comics Code* and brought about the end of *Pre-Code Horror Comics.* At that time, I'll provide a complete listing of every horror comic title of the 1950's. For now, I offer the list of *Pre-Code Horror* publishers:

The Pre-Code Horror Publishers

⇒ related names In ( )

Ace
Ajax-Farrell
American Comics Group
Atlas (Marvel)
Avon
Charlton (Capitol)
Comic Media
DC
EC
Fawcett
Fiction House
Gilmore (Aragon, Stanmore, Key)
Harvey
Master-Merit
PL Publishing
Prize
Quality
Ribage
Standard
Star
Sterling
St. John
Story
Superior
Toby
Trojan
Youthful Magazine
Ziff-Davis

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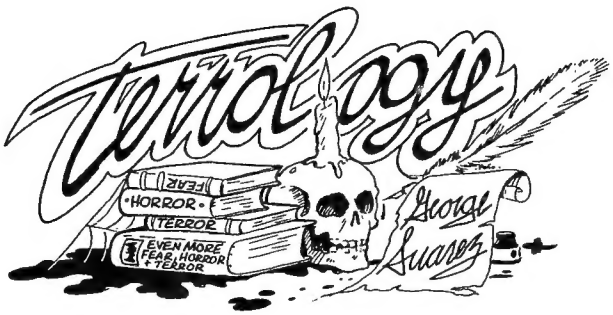

Chapter Two: *Sound and Fury I...*

Tales Too Terrible To Tell has been published by NEC for fun and as a tribute to a comic book genre beloved by many fans but only just recently becoming known to the comic-collecting masses: the *Pre-Code Horror Comics* of the 1950's.

Terrology is the name of an Index/Collector's Guide to these comics which will be written by me and published by NEC sometime in the next couple of years. This book will be a complete and detailed review of every horror comic published prior to the advent of the Comics Code in 1955. *Terrology* will be compiled via direct access to copies of every such comic and will, I hope, include hundreds of full color cover repros as well as representative interior art. This work will be intended as a "scholarly" examination of an important period in the history of the development of the comic book. While accessible by all, *Terrology* will be specifically targeted toward the serious collector/fan of *Pre-Code Horror.* In the meantime, while **TTTTT** comes out every three months or so, *Terrology* will appear as the title of a column in which I will attempt to provide the general comic reader with some basic background and information about the fascinating world of 1950's *Horror Comics.*

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In **TTTTT #1,** we discussed the early origins of *Pre-Code Horror.* My plan was to continue *Terrology* this issue with a discussion of the growth and development of the horror comic phenomenon, and the factors leading to the problems which gave birth to the *Comics Code* and brought about the end of *Pre-Code Horror Comics.* However, the majority of our mail, along with conversation with readers at conventions, leads me to believe that fans would most enjoy a general overview of the individual horror comic publishers listed at the end of last issue's *Terrology.* Always eager to please, I offer this overview of *The Pre-Code Horror Publishers!* Covering all 28 companies will take more space than one issue of **Tales Too Terrible To Tell** can spare for *Terrology* so this overview will continue into **TTTTT #3.** We'll begin with a complete listing of all *Pre-Code Horror* titles with the complete history of their issue numbers.

The Pre-Code Horror Publishers

Ace
ACG
Ajax-Farrell
Atlas
Avon
Charlton
Comic Media
DC
EC
Fawcett
Fiction House
Fox
Gilmor
Harvey
PL
Premier
Prize
Quality
Standard
Star
Sterling
St. John
Story
Superior
Toby
Trojan
Youthful
Ziff-Davis

Note that I've made some minor changes to this list since **TTTTT #1.** I've deleted Master-Merit and Ribage. They all appear to be other names for Story. I've also added Fox, which published one horror comic, and Premier, which published two. Thusly, the count of 28 *Pre-Code Horror* publishers mentioned elsewhere continues to stand!

The Pre-Code Horror Titles

A few NOTES to increase comprehension and reading pleasure!

1. Alternative names (i.e., *alter egos*) for publishers appear in parentheses ( ) under their most common name.

2. An *asterisk* (*) next to a title indicates that occasional issues had science-fiction (S) or crime (C) themes rather than horror.

3. A *double-asterisk* (**) means that this occurred frequently: it may well be argued that the title does not deserve to be on the list. Those who may quibble with some omissions from this list should, before hastening to write me in argument, re-read my DEFINITION OF A "HORROR COMIC" in TTTTT #1. This definition has guided my decisions in all debatable cases! If you *still* disagree, by all means let me know!

4. Title changes, publisher changes, publisher name changes and confusion in numbering occur with bewildering frequency in comics from the 1950's. I've tried to be as clear as possible in these listings. Where in doubt, I've always gone by the information in the inside *indicia* rather than on the cover. However, I haven't allowed trivial name changes to affect the classifications. For example, the output of all of Stanley Morse's various companies have all been included under Gilmor.

5. Publication dates are those in the above-mentioned indicia. Like with modern comics, these dates are probably one to three months later than when the comics actually came out. Certainly, I would have preferred to list actual release dates but this information is forever lost. For the sake of simplicity, *double months* are listed as the first month at the beginning of a run (e.g.: Jan-Feb 52 becomes Jan 52) and the second month at the end (e.g.: Jul-Aug 54 becomes Aug 54.) Where only a year or a season is listed (e.g. 1952 or Fall 52), that's all the information offered by the indicia!

6. Publisher names have been *"simplified"* for readability. Most names as listed in indicia included standard legalese such as "PL *Publishing*" or "Ace *Magazines*." I refer to them in the simplest forms: "PL" or "Ace." After all, to be perfectly correct, fans should refer to "Marvel" as the "Marvel *Comics Group*." But most do NOT... do they?

No doubt there are a few errors in these listings, despite our best efforts at accuracy. If you find some, let me know!

Ace

Baffling Mysteries #5-24	Nov 51-Jan 55
#25 & 26 Code-approved.	
The Beyond #1-30	Nov 50-Jan 55
Challenge of the Unknown #6	Sep 50
Hand of Fate #8-25(11/54), 25(12/54), 26	Dec 51-Mar 55
Web of Mystery #1-27	Feb 51-Nov 54
#28 & 29 Code-approved.	

Ace published 98 horror comics in 5 titles from September 1950 to March 1955.

ACG
(American Comics Group)

Adventures into the Unknown #1-61	Fall 48-Feb 55
Continued as Code-approved #62-174.	
The Clutching Hand #1	Jul 54
Forbidden Worlds #1-34	Jul 51-Nov 54
Revived as Code-approved #35-145; "revived" as opposed to "continued" means that the title was cancelled or suspended for a while and then restarted where the numbering was left off.	
Out of the Night #1-17	Feb 52-Nov 54
Skeleton Hand #1-6	Sep 52-Aug 53

ACG published 123 horror comics in 5 titles from Fall 1948 to November 1954.

Ajax-Farrell

Fantastic Fears #7,8,3-9	May 53-Oct 54
Fantastic Comics #10,11	Nov 54-Feb 55
Haunted Thrills #1-18	Jun 52-Dec 54
Strange Fantasy #2(8/52),2(10/52)-14	Aug 52-Nov 54
Voodoo #1-19	May 52-Feb 55
Voodoo Annual #1	1952

Ajax-Farrell published 64 horror comics in 6 titles from May 1952 to February 1955.

Atlas
(Marvel)

Atlas published its titles under lots of dummy corporations. See the Overstreet Guide for a complete list. This was done for technical legal reasons and none of these dummy corporate names deserve noting here.

Adventures into Terror #43-44, 3-31	Nov 50-May 54
Adventures into Weird Worlds #1-30	Jan 52-Jun 54
Amazing Detective Cases #11-14	Mar 52-Sep 52
Amazing Mysteries #32-33	May 49-Jul 49
Astonishing (*S: early issues) #3-37	April 51-Feb 55
Continued as Code-approved #38-63.	
Captain America's Weird Tales #74-75	Oct 49-Feb 50
Journey into Mystery #1-22	Jun 52-Feb 55
Continued as Code-approved #23-125.	
Journey into Unknown Worlds (*S: early issues) #36-38,4-33	Sep 50-Feb 55
Continued as Code-approved #34-59.	
Marvel Tales #93-131	Aug 49-Feb 55
Continued as Code-approved #132-159.	
Menace #1-11	Mar 53-May 54
Men's Adventures #21-26	May 53-Mar 54
Mystery Tales #1-26	Mar 52-Feb 55
Continued as Code-approved #27-54.	
Mystic #1-36	Mar 51-Mar 55
Continued as Code-approved #37-61.	
Spellbound #1-23	Mar 52-Jun 54
Revived as Code-approved #24-34.	
Strange Tales #1-34	Jun 51-Feb 55
Continued as Code-approved #35-168.	
Suspense #1-29	Dec 49-Apr 53
Uncanny Tales #1-28	Jun 52-Jan 55
Continued as Code-approved #29-56; it is well-known among Atlas collectors that the #57 listed in Overstreet (complete with an Al Williamson credit, no less!) does NOT exist.	
Venus (*S #12, at least) #12-19	Feb 51-Apr 52

Atlas published 399 horror comics in 18 titles from May 1949 to March 1955.

Avon
(Realistic)

City of the Living Dead	1952
The Dead Who Walk	1952
Diary of Horror	Dec 52
Eerie #1,#1-17	Jan 47, May 51-Sep 54
Night of Mystery	1953
Phantom Witch Doctor	1952
Secret Diary of Eerie Adventures #1	1953
Giant-sized 25c "reprint" containing 4 rebound comics.	
Witchcraft #1-6	Mar 52-Mar 53

Avon published 30 horror comics in 8 titles from January 1947 to September 1954.

Charlton
(Capitol)

Strange Suspense Stories #16-22	Jan 54-Nov 54
Title formerly Lawbreakers SS for #10-15. Title changes to:	
This is Suspense #23	Feb 55
#24 Code-approved.	
Thing! #1-17	Feb 52-Nov 54
This Magazine is Haunted #15-21	Mar 54-Nov 54
Title revived from Fawcett run #1-14.	

Charlton published 32 horror comics in 4 titles from February 1952 to February 1955.

Comic Media

Horrific #1-13	Sep 52-Sep 54
Title changes to:	
Terrific #14	Dec 54
Weird Terror #1-13	Sep 52-Sep 54

Comic Media published 27 horror comics in 3 titles from September 1952 to December 1954.

DC

House of Mystery #1-35 — Dec 51-Feb 55
Continues as Code-approved #36-321.
Sensation Comics #107-109 — Dec 51-Jun 52
Title changes to:
Sensation Mystery #110-116 — Jul 52-Aug 53

DC published 45 horror comics in 3 titles from December 1951 to February 1955.

EC

Crypt of Terror #17-19 — Apr 50-Sep 50
Title changes to:
Tales from the Crypt #20-46 — Oct 50-Mar 55
Haunt of Fear #15-17,4-28 — May 50-Dec 54
Tales of Terror Annual #1-3 — 1951-1953
25c "reprint" giant contained four rebound comics with the covers removed. Contents can and frequently do vary from issue to issue. First issue contained 1/4-1/2 science fiction comics; some examples of #2 & #3 contain science fiction, crime and shock titles.
3-D Tales from the Crypt of Terror #2 — Spr 54
Issue #1, entitled 3-Dimensional EC Classics, despite a horror cover and horror cover blurbs, is NOT a horror comic.
Vault of Horror #12-40 — Apr 50-Jan 55

EC published 91 horror comics in 6 titles from April 1950 to March 1955.

A FAWCETT PUBLICATION

Fawcett

Beware Terror Tales #1-8 — May 52-Jul 53
Strange Suspense Stories #1-5 — Jun 52-Feb 53
Title revived a year later—see Charlton listings.
Unknown World #1 — Jun 52
Title changes to:
Strange Stories from Another World #2-5 — Aug 52-Feb 53
This Magazine is Haunted #1-14 — Oct 51-Dec 53
Continues as Charlton title #15-21.
Worlds Beyond #1 — Nov 51
Title changes to:
Worlds of Fear #2-9 — Jan 52-Jun 53

Fawcett published 41 horror comics in 7 titles from October 1951 to December 1953.

Fiction House

Ghost Comics #1-11 — 1951-1954
The Monster #1-2 — 1953

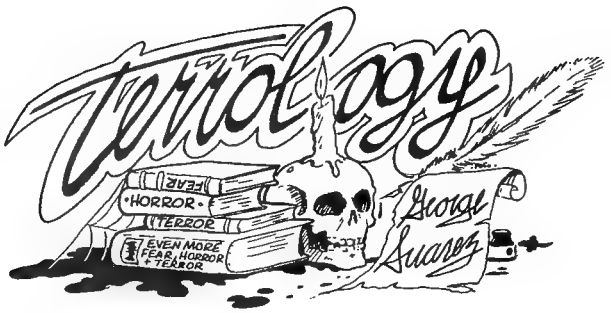
Fiction House published 13 horror comics in 2 titles from 1951 to 1954.

Fox

A Star Presentation #3 — May 50
This comic contains an adaption of Dr. Jeckyll & Mr. Hyde which was later reprinted in Star's Startling Terror Tales #10. This IS a horror comic. But if you ask me why I include this and none of the Classic Illustrated adaptions of famous horror stories... well, I'm still cogitating upon the distinction.

Fox published 1 horror comic in May 1950.

Our next publisher, Gilmor, is somewhat of a biggie so rather than split the information up, we'll run it in its entirety, along with Harvey through Ziff-Davis in our next installment of *Terrology* in **Tales Too Terrible To Tell #3.** *Watch for it!*



Chapter Three: *Sound and Fury II...*

Tales Too Terrible To Tell has been published by NEC for fun and as a tribute to a comic book genre beloved by many fans but only just recently becoming known to the comic-collecting masses: the *Pre-Code Horror Comics* of the 1950's.

Terrology is the name of an Index/Collector's Guide to these comics which will be written by me and published by NEC sometime in the next couple of years. This book will be a complete and detailed review of every horror comic published prior to the advent of the Comics Code in 1955. *Terrology* will be compiled via direct access to copies of every such comic and will, I hope, include hundreds of full color cover repros as well as representative interior art. This work will be intended as a "scholarly" examination of an important period in the history of the development of the comic book. While accessible by all, *Terrology* will be specifically targeted toward the serious collector/fan of *Pre-Code Horror.* In the meantime, while TTTTT comes out every three months or so (or more as the case may be!), *Terrology* will appear as the title of a column in which I will attempt to provide the general comic reader with some basic background and information about the fascinating world of 1950's *Horror Comics.*

In *Terrology* in **TTTTT #2,** we began our detailed overview of the *Pre-Code Horror Publishers.*

In that installment, we covered:
Ace, ACG, Ajax-Farrell, Atlas, Avon, Charlton, Comic Media, DC, EC, Fawcett, Fiction House and Fox.

This issue, we continue our coverage with:
Gilmor, Harvey, PL, Premier, Prize, Quality, Standard, Star, Sterling, St. John, Story, Superior, Toby, Trojan, Youthful and Ziff-Davis.

Gilmor
(Aragon, Key, Stanmor, Media)

Note that Gilmor was misspelled as Gillmor in my publisher listing in TTTTT #1. I've also seen the publisher's name misspelled as Gilmorg in other indices and price guides.

Mister Mystery #1-19	Sep 51-Oct 54
Weird Chills #1-3	Jul 54-Nov 54
Weird Mysteries #1-12	Oct 52-Sep 54
Weird Tales of the Future (*S) #1-8	Mar 52-Jul 53

Gilmor published 42 horror comics in 4 titles from September 1951 to November 1954.

Harvey

Black Cat Mystery #30-53	Aug 51-Dec 54
Formerly Black Cat Comics; #29 has a witch on cover but contents are straight super-hero.	
Chamber of Chills #21-24,5-26	Jun 51-Dec 54
Tomb of Terror (*S last few issues) #1-16	Jun 51-Jul 54
Title changes to:	
Thrills of Tomorrow #17-18	Oct 54-Dec 54
All reprints from earlier issues.	
Witches Tales #1-28	Jan 51-Dec 54
Becomes Witches' Western Tales for #29-30!	

Harvey published 96 horror comics in 5 titles from January 1951 to December 1954.

PL

Weird Adventures #1-3	May 51-Oct 51
#1 credited as XL Publishing.	

PL published 3 horror comics in 1 title from May 1951 to October 1951.

Premier

Horror from the Tomb #1	Sep 54
Title changes to:	
Mysterious Stories #2	Dec 54
#3-7 Code-approved.	

Premier published 2 horror comics in 2 titles from September 1954 to December 1954.

Star

Blue Bolt Weird Tales #111-119	Nov 51-Jun 53
Title changes to:	
Ghostly Weird Stories #120-124	Sep 53-Sep 54
Spook (**C) #22-29	Jan 53-Jul 54

Most issues contain a new horror story padded with crime reprints; borderline horror title at best!

Startling Terror Tales #10-14,4-11	May 52-Sep 54

Star published 34 horror comics in 4 titles from November 1951 to September 1954.

Sterling

The Tormented #1-2	Jul 54-Sep 54

Sterling published 2 horror comics in 1 title from July 1954 to September 1954.

St. John

All-Picture Adventures #1	Nov 52
Giant-sized "reprint" with 3 rebound comics at 25c cover price.	
House of Terror 3-D #1	Oct 53
Strange Terrors #1-7	Jun 52-Mar 53
#6 & 7 are 25c giants.	
Weird Horrors #1-9	Jun 52-Oct 53
Title changes to:	
Nightmare #10-13	Dec 53-Aug 54
Title changes again to:	
Amazing Ghost Stories #14-16	Oct 54-Feb 55
Nightmare #3	Oct 53

To add to the confusion, St. John also published the last issue of Ziff-Davis' Nightmare title!

St. John published 26 horror comics in 7 titles from June 1952 to February 1955.

Prize

Black Magic V1#1-33	Oct 50-Dec 54
Frankenstein #18-33	Mar 52-Sep 54

Prize published 49 horror comics in 2 titles from October 1950 to December 1954.

Quality

Intrigue #1	Jan 55
Web of Evil #1-21	Nov 52-Dec 54

Quality published 22 horror comics in 2 titles from November 1952 to January 1955.

Standard

Adventures into Darkness #5-14	Aug 52-Jun 54
Fantastic Worlds (**S) #5-7	Sep 52-Jan 53
Lost Worlds #5-6 (**S)	Oct 52-Dec 52
Out of the Shadows #5-14	Jul 52-Aug 53
Unseen #5-15	Jun 52-Jul 54

Standard published 36 horror comics in 5 titles from June 1952 to July 1954.

Story
(Master, Merit, Ribage)

Dark Mysteries #1-22 — Jun 51-Mar 55
23,24 Code-approved.
Fight Against Crime (**C #1-5; *C after) #1-21 — May 51-Sep 54
Becomes Fight Against the Guilty for #22-23.
Mysterious Adventures #1-23 — Mar 51-Dec 54
#24,25 Code-approved.

Story published 66 horror comics in 3 titles from March 1951 to March 1955.

Superior

***Adventure into Fear #1,** listed in Overstreet as published in 1951 does not exist. Trust me!*
Journey into Fear #1-21 — May 51-Sep 54
Mysteries Weird & Strange #1-11 — May 53-Jan 55
Strange Mysteries #1-21 — Sep 51-Jan 55

Superior published 53 horror comics in 3 titles from May 1951 to January 1955.

Toby
(Minoan)

Purple Claw #1-3 — Jan 53-May 53
Tales of Horror #1-13 — Jun 52-Oct 54
Tales of Terror #1 — 1952
Cancelled after Bill Gaines of EC complained that the title violated EC's copyright on its Tales of Terror Annual.

Toby published 17 horror comics in 3 titles from 1952 to October 1954.

Trojan

Beware! #13-16,5-14 — Jan 53-Mar 55
Continues as Merit's **Beware** *#15 for one Code-approved issue.*

Trojan published 14 horror comics in 1 title from January 1953 to March 1955.

Youthful

Fantastic #8-9 — Feb 52-Apr 52
Formerly Captain Science; title changes to:
Beware #10-12 — Jun 52-Oct 52
Title changes to:
Chilling Tales #13-17 — Dec 52-Oct 53

Youthful published 10 horror comics in 3 titles from February 1952 to October 1953.

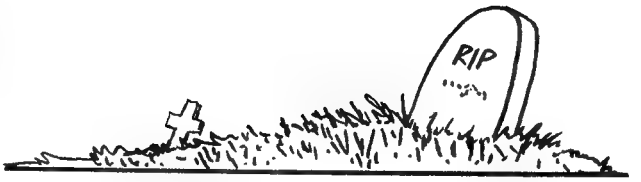
Ziff-Davis

Amazing Adventures (**S) #1-5 — 1950-Nov 51
Eerie Adventures #1 — Winter 53
Nightmare #1-2 — Summer 52-Fall 52
Continues as St. John's Nightmare #3.
Weird Adventures #10 — Jul 51
Weird Thrillers #1-5 — Sep 51-Nov 52

Ziff-Davis published 14 horror comics in 5 titles from 1950 to Winter 1953.

All together, the above listing encompasses 28 companies publishing 1450 horror comics scattered among 119 titles (average 12+ comics per title) from January 1947 to March 1955, a period of 99 months. Or, an average production of 14-1/2 comics per month. Actually, the average zooms up to over 50 per month if we consider only the hottest period: 1951-1954.

A recap, ranked in order of output:



The Horror Comic Publishers Output

Publisher	Comics	Titles	First	Last
Atlas	399	18	May 49	Mar 55
ACG	123	5	Fal 48	Nov 54
Ace	98	5	Sep 50	Mar 55
Harvey	96	5	Jan 51	Dec 54
EC	91	6	Apr 50	Mar 55
Story	66	7	Mar 51	Jan 55
Ajax-Farrell	64	6	May 52	Feb 55
Superior	53	3	May 51	Jan 55
Prize	49	2	Oct 50	Dec 54
DC	45	3	Dec 51	Feb 55
Gilmor	42	4	Sep 51	Nov 54
Fawcett	41	7	Oct 51	Dec 53
Standard	36	5	Jun 52	Jul 54
Star	34	4	Nov 51	Sep 54
Charlton	32	4	Feb 52	Feb 55
Avon	30	8	Jan 47	Sep 54
Comic Media	27	3	Sep 52	Dec 54
St. John	26	7	Jun 52	Feb 55
Quality	22	2	Nov 52	Jan 55
Toby	17	3	1952	Oct 54
Ziff-Davis	14	5	1950	Win 53
Trojan	14	1	Jan 53	Mar 55
Fiction House	13	2	1951	1954
Youthful	10	3	Feb 52	Oct 53
PL	3	1	May 51	Dec 51
Sterling	2	1	Jul 54	Sep 54
Premier	2	2	Sep 54	Dec 54
Fox	1	1	May 50	May 50

Another interesting way to rank *Pre-Code Horror Publishers* is by how early they got onto the "bandwagon."

The Horror Comic Publishers "Bandwagon"

Publisher	Date of First Horror Comic
Avon	Jan 47
ACG	Fall 48
Atlas	May 49
EC	Apr 50
Fox	May 50
Ace	Sep 50
Prize	Oct 50
Ziff-Davis	1950
Harvey	Jan 51
Story	Mar 51
PL	May 51
Superior	May 51
Gilmor	Sep 51
Fawcett	Oct 51
Star	Nov 51
DC	Dec 51
Fiction House	1951
Charlton	Feb 52
Youthful	Feb 52
Ajax-Farrell	May 52
Standard	Jun 52
St. John	Jun 52
Comic Media	Sep 52
Quality	Nov 52
Toby	1952
Trojan	Jan 53
Sterling	Jul 54
Premier	Sep 54

Worth noting from the above is the fact that most publishers jumped on the "bandwagon" in 1951 or 1952. Remarkably, only three new *Pre-Code Horror Publishers* started production from 1953-on and all three were trivial forces in the industry. Considering the huge success of horror in the world of comics during these years, I find it surprising that more *Johny-Come-Latelies* didn't come along in the later years. I suspect that the glut on the market was so extreme that newsstand rack room for a new publisher's output was simply nonexistent. There's no point in *publishing* comic books if you can't *sell* them.

This concludes our general overview of the *Pre-Code Horror Publishers*. Research credit for some of the information presented above goes to Billy Devine, *Esoteric Comic Collector Extraordinaire.*

Planned for the next *Terrology* in **Tales Too Terrible To Tell #4** is a more detailed publisher-by-publisher discussion. Rather than follow alphabetical order for this review, we'll skip around and cover some of the most interesting companies first. Your suggestions as to which companies to examine first are welcome! Feel free to write me directly at **NEC Press, PO Box 310, Quincy, MA 02269.** I look forward to hearing from you.

Chapter Four:
Ajax-Farrell & Comic Media

Beginning this issue, we will focus our attention specifically on *individual* **Pre-Code Horror Publishers.** We will present detailed overviews of two companies every issue. So this time around, we direct your attention to one "biggie" (Ajax-Farrell) and one smaller outfit (Comic Media.)

AJAX-FARRELL and **COMIC MEDIA** are among my favorite **Pre-Code Horror Publishers** because of their garish, caustic and unrepentant approach to producing horror comics. There's nothing *subtle* about the creative process here: Ajax-Farrell and Comic Media stories never appear in the adjectival guises of "educational" or "classic" or "moralistic." While evil often gets its just reward in the end, these tales can hardly be justified as comic book morality plays: even when the bad guy does pay the penalty, lots of "good guys" have suffered horrendously along the way! Furthermore, in several stories, the bad guys get away *scot free!*

Comic book horror stories can be simplistically classified into two categories: what I like to call *"fuzzy"* and *"sharp."* These terms apply both to plot and art. "Fuzzy" stories have murky drawings with complex storylines which tend to conclude without complete (critics would say *"satisfactory"*) resolution. Graham Ingels is a fuzzy artist. Bernie Krigstein is *usually* fuzzy. "Sharp" stories offer clear delineations in artwork and plots which proceed inexorably to a crisp and exact conclusion. Johnny Craig and Jack Davis are "sharp" artists. Remarkably, I've found that one or the other of these descriptions applies to most comic book horror stories. Ajax-Farrell stories are almost always sharp. In Comic Media comics, sharp stories dominate but fuzzy work appears on occasion—often in the hands of Rudy Palais.

Ajax-Farrell's line of horror comics was born in May of 1952; Comic Media's output began in September of the same year. The companies are quite *distinct* in style and content—as will become apparent in this column. However, there is also evidence that Ajax-Farrell and Comic Media were related in a legal sense at some time. This will be discussed shortly also.

TERROLOGY

TERROLOGY is the name of an **Index/Collector's Guide to the Pre-Code Horror Comics** which will be written by me and published by NEC sometime in the next couple of years. This book will be a complete and detailed review of every horror comic published prior to the advent of the *Comics Code* in 1955. *Terrology* will be compiled via direct access to copies of every such comic and will, I hope, include hundreds of full color cover repros as well as representative interior art. This work will be intended as a "scholarly" examination of an important period in the history of the development of the comic book. While accessible by all, *Terrology* will be specifically targeted toward the serious collector/fan of *Pre-Code Horror.* In the meantime, while **TTTTT** comes out quarterly, *Terrology* will appear as the title of a column in which I will attempt to provide the comic reader with some basic background and info about the fascinating world of 1950's **Pre-Code Horror Comics.**

AJAX — A Farrell Publication

Ajax-Farrell published 64 horror comics in 6 titles from May 1952 to February 1955:

Fantastic Fears #7, 8, 3-9	May 53-Oct 54
Fantastic Comics #10, 11	Nov 54-Feb 55
Haunted Thrills #1-18	Jun 52-Dec 54
Strange Fantasy	
#2(8/52), 2(10/52)-14	Aug 52-Nov 54
Voodoo #1-19	May 52-Feb 55
Voodoo Annual #1	1952

"Ajax" appears for the first time on comic covers with the July-August 1954 issues. Prior to that, the company's comics bore the legend: "A Farrell Publication." Ajax's publications were among the minority of *Pre-Code Horror Comics* which do *not* show issue #'s on the cover. (They *do* show the *month* of publication but not the *year.)*

Ajax-Farrell was founded by Robert W. Farrell who is credited as the "Publisher" in the indicia. The corporate ownership situation is a bit more complicated. Students of *Pre-Code Horror* rapidly become familiar with the bewildering confusion of corporate ownership in this world. For complex reasons—involving perhaps both tax savings and legal protection—*Pre-Code Horror* publishers would typically place their individual titles under ownership of several different corporations. In the case of Ajax, **Fantastic Fears** and **Voodoo** are owned by something called Four Star Publications, Inc. **Strange Fantasy** and **Haunted Thrills** are owned by Farrell Comics, Inc. By mid-1953, a company named Dearfield Publishing Co., Inc. gets involved. What's interesting is that this last company also appears in ownership statements for Comic Media. More on *that* later.

Ajax-Farrell's Art Director is listed as **I.M. Iger.** That makes sense since most stories appearing in these comics were drawn by the *"Iger Shop."* This was a studio of artists maintained by "Jerry" Iger, whose employees produced thousands of pages of comic art for various companies in the 1930's through the 1950's. Iger artists had a standard "look and feel" and this makes it almost impossible to credit individuals for any specific story. Outside of one Steve Dikto story, a couple by Bob Powell, several nice offerings by Matt Baker, a crime reprint by L.B. Cole, and the work of three or four artists I'm still trying to track down, I've been unable to credit Ajax-Farrell stories to anyone other than "Iger Shop."

The Iger Shop specialized in *"Good Girl Art"*, particularly involving jungle environments and the studio's work appears frequently in jungle titles from publishers like Fiction House, Fox and Star. Ajax occasionally purchased *straight* jungle stories for their horror comics: several appear in **Voodoo,** a title which while absolutely *meeting* my requirements for *Pre-Code Horror* status, had enough "trappings" of a jungle comic to make one wonder at times. Ajax's horror titles also included *straight* crime stories on occasion: I suspect some of these are reprints from other publishers but have not been able to track them down yet.

Speaking of *"Good Girl Art"*, Ajax-Farrell's editors recognized the appeal of *pulchritude* in selling comics to male juveniles. This is apparent in most of their stories which abound with *leggy* and sexy females being pestered by mad scientists, evil maniacs, warped old men as well as supernatural creatures like werewolves, vampires and demons. Ajax horror comics are well-populated by such metaphysical monsters: demons of every

Example of "Pulchritude"
From *Dollar$ and Doom* **(Voodoo #8)**

sort are common. The devil and his followers make *regular* appearances and several stories take place and/or end up in Hades. "Jesus Christ" appears in **Haunted Thrills #14,** to counter Satan's influence over a derelict who uses the *Trumpet of Doom* to raise the dead and terrorize a city.

In many ways, the story *Trumpet of Doom* is just *odd* enough to be *typical* of Ajax-Farrell output. The *impact* of Ajax stories is found more in the outlandish plots, strange settings, garish colors and moody, portentious atmospheres than in *excesses* of violence, mayhem or gore. However, this isn't meant to imply that Ajax doesn't go to *extremes* at times! Two of the Ajax stories reprinted in this **TTTTT**, *Fiends from the Crypt*, with its loathsome underground monsters, and *Hollow Horror,* immortalized forever as the *"decapitation by paper-cutter story"*, are examples of ex-

A Christ-like character appears in **Haunted Thrills #14**

tremism. But neither goes to the literary limits which got publishers like EC into trouble. *Fiends from the Crypt* is too cartoony to be *truly* troubling and *Hollow Horror* borders on the farcical. It's important to note that both carefully (and *unrealistically*, I might add) avoid depiction of blood and gore in the telling of these quite gruesome tales.

Black Death, the third Ajax story in this issue is a good example of the company's "jungle monster" theme which appears occasionally in its horror comics. It's also a classic example of Iger Shop *"Good Girl Art"* complete with a *"legs-protuding-from-panel"* scene on page 4. Another classic example of "leg art" appears in *Devil's Ballet* from **Haunted Thrills #17.** (See the *last* page of this **Terrology.**) This story originally appeared in Comic Media's **Horrific #1** as *The Dancer of Death!* While reprinting stories *within* a publisher's output is not uncommon in the *Pre-Code Horror* era (Comic Media did it often), this is a rare case of a *cross-publisher* reprint.

Now, let's move onto title-by-title reviews of Ajax-Farrell. Note that in terms of art styles and story themes, Ajax's four titles are essentially interchangeable. But there are some subtle differences which are worthy of note. Note that references to particular issues and stories are all *subjective* and frequently the product of *my own* preferences and prejudices. Furthermore, recommendations are limited due to the inevitable limitation of space. Many issues not mentioned will contain stories which you may find equally or more interesting. When **Terrology** finally appears in *complete* form, *no* interesting stories will go unmentioned!

Haunted Thrills

I consider this to be Ajax's *"flagship"* title. While it began one month *after* **Voodoo,** and ran one issue *fewer,* **Voodoo** has a few too many *straight* jungle stories to qualify as the *quintessential* Ajax horror comic. That honor goes to **Haunted Thrills.** In terms of $$, for the most part *all* Ajax horror comics may be recommended as interesting *Pre-Code Horror* comics at quite reasonable prices. Now, let's make some specific recommendations about individual issues *especially* worth spending money for!

Haunted Thrills #2 contains a house ad which promotes five *non*-existent titles, in addition to the four we've come to know and love. These five "phantoms" are: **Dark Shadows, Bewitched, Dark Journey, Strange** and the *inanely*-named **Suspooks.** These comics may have been on the Ajax drawing board but they never came into being. At least, not in the *Pre-Code* era. **Dark Shadows** and **Strange** appeared as *Post*-Code Ajax's in 1957, along with a comic named **Strange Journey.** Both lasted only three to six issues apiece. *Thank Heaven* a "horror" comic named **Suspooks** was never inflicted upon the world!

Issue #5, in addition to a superb (but somewhat formulaic) cover depicting a giant skull with ghouls emerging from its cavities (see **TTTTT**'s back cover) contains *three* neat stories: *House of Chills,* about a maniac butcher in a 19th-century German village; *Hands of Terror,* all about murder and ghosts in the Old South; and the especially noteworthy *Fatal Scalpel.*

This vicious tale is about a drunken plastic surgeon who finally gets his *more-than-just* desserts for botching operations!

Issues #7 and #11 contain horror tales with a Nazi theme. In #7's *Screams in the Night,* Adolf Hitler, prowling about post-war occupied Germany, recruits a surgeon to alter his features. In #11's *Out of the Grave,* an evil Nazi colonel suffers retribution for making a pair of boots out of the skin of a concentration camp victim. The brutality of the Nazi regime, particularly manifested in the death camps, was fertile fodder for most publishers of *Pre-Code Horror,* as you'll see in future issues of **TTTTT.**

In **Haunted Thrills #13,** *Experiment in Terror* investigates the age-old question: *Does Love Conquer All?* The prototypical mad scientist wants to determine whether true love can overcome the demands of basic animal needs like hunger. The story also incidentally resolves the issue of hunger vs the ancient taboo against cannibalism! *Hmm...* this issue *is* pretty perverse: In *Death Do Us Part,* a female gorilla "courts" a human explorer and tries to kill his wife when he rejects her (the *ape,* that is!)

Does Love Conquer *Hunger?*

In the **final issue, #18,** *No Place To Go* relates the fascinating adventure of a dead man rejected *both* by Heaven and Hell! Apparently, the problem is that while alive, Wilbur never did anything particularly *good...* or particularly *bad.* The "after-life placement service" has *nothing* to go on! He gets sent back to do *something* of significance... either good *or* bad!

The convenience of home-delivered hemoglobin!
From *Nightmare Merchant* in **Strange Fantasy #7**

Strange Fantasy

Strange Fantasy started and ended around the same dates as **Haunted Thrills.** The title produced four *fewer* issues because it remained *bi*-monthly throughout its run, unlike **HT** which came out monthly for a period in 1953.

The first two issues of **Strange Fantasy** are both listed as **#2** in their indicia. This is because the publication was retitled from **Rocketman** after one issue. Ajax comics never carried numbers on their covers—only the month—so maybe the customers were not confused by this duplication. However, I remember reading a letter in an EC fanzine many years ago where a fan expressed frustration in not being able to locate any of the first eleven issues of **Vault of Horror!** (**VoH** *started* with #12).

Issue #7 contains one of the *best* Ajax stories ever: *Nightmare Merchant.* This 8-page blockbuster relates the homey adventure of a "typical" American couple who buy a house which just happens to be on the route of a **blood delivery service for vampires!** And wait till the delivery man comes to collect his *bill!*

Issue #10 contains another classic entitled *Bloody Mary,* a "Bad Seed" *(remember the movie?)* type tale about a nasty little girl (named, strangely, "Sister") who cold-bloodedly kills her foster mother and, feigning innocence and sweetness, blames it all on the foster dad, who is jurisdictionally hung as a result. After stabbing a suspicious psychiatrist to death, she returns to the orphanage to await placement with another family. Since this "devil's child" appears to get away with her crimes, this story cries out for a sequel. But sequels virtually never happened in the days of **Pre-Code Horror.** *Bloody Mary* is a *must-read!* (We'll probably run it in the next issue of **TTTTT.**)

Fantastic Fears

Fantastic Fears is Ajax's *shortest*-running horror comic. The title started about a year *after* its sisters; the first issue bears the number 7—the result of a title change from **Captain Jet.** The second issue is #8, logically; then the numbering reverts correctly to #3. The title changes to **Fantastic Comics** *(no* **Fears)** for the last two issues. The cover subtitle blurb also changes from the enticing *"Tales of Stalking Terror!"* to the trite *"Tales of Enchantment!"* in #10 (Nov-Dec 1954) and *"Amazing Adventures!"* in the final issue, #11 (Jan-Feb '55). Whether this title change is due to problems with censorship is unclear; certainly Ajax's other titles containing words like "Strange" and "Haunted" were unaffected.

Let's digress to discuss this title change for a second. While none of the other Ajax titles were altered, two had their subtitles changed, and one was *cancelled* around the same time! Yes, Voodoo's subtitle, *"Weird Fantastic Tales"* for 17 issues, changed to *"Astounding Fantasy!"* in #18 (Nov-Dec '54) and finally to *"Tales of Jungle Magic!"* with the subsequent and last one. (The title changed to the *all-jungle* **Vooda** format one issue later, as discussed shortly.) **Haunted Thrills** covers carried the blurb *"Tales of Horror and Terror!"* for 17 issues; the final issue (#18, Nov '54) promoted itself as *"Tales of Strange Suspense!"* Finally, **Strange Fantasy,** always cover-blurbed as *"Eerie Tales of Suspense!",* was cancelled with the Oct-Nov '54 issue.

What does this all *mean?* Well, clearly Ajax was taking preventive action against problems which might arise when the Comics Code went into effect in 1955. The *Code,* a self-regulatory censorship pact "voluntarily" agreed to by comics

publishers and newsstand distributors was designed as part of an effort to keep at least a miserable "rump" of the comics industry alive. It *failed,* as most publishers in business in 1954 did *not* survive to 1956. The Code specifically banned the words *"Crime", "Horror", "Terror"* and *"Weird"* from the titles of comic books. (Many interpreted this as a specific attack on EC, which had four major titles bearing these words.) Obviously, Ajax-Farrell changed cover subtitles which contained the same *no-no* words. While *"Fear"* wasn't specifically banned, Ajax probably dropped it from **Fantastic Fears** because of closeness to another now-*pariah* EC title, **Haunt of Fear.** Perhaps **Strange Fantasy** died because of a similarity to EC's **Weird Fantasy**. The answer to why the title was never just changed to **Strange,** a name Ajax had already advertised as a coming title, is probably lost in the sands of time...

Okay, *enough already* with interesting digressions! The **second issue** of **Fantastic Fears** contains a great horrified fairy tale entitled *Little Red Riding Hood and the Big Bad Werewolf.* I always enjoy this kind of self-spoofing horror parody—especially when it comes in very infrequent doses. This tale is introduced by The Old Crone, in her one-and-only appearance. Comic Media made much greater use of horror hosts. As with most such fractured fairy tales, this particular story ends with an unusual twist: Little Red turns out to have a sinister secret at least as *dark* as that of "Elmer" the Werewolf.

Fantastic Fears #8 (#2) also contains *Fiends from the Crypt,* which appears in complete form in this **TTTTT.** The story *Carnival of Terror* features cobras with human heads. Human beings being transformed into snakes, or *half*-snakes, is a recurrent theme in Ajax comics. Ironically, the cover of **Fantastic Fears #3** depicts a snake charmer with a basket of *cobra-humans:* one would suspect that the cover was actually intended for the *previous* issue. This happened several times in Ajax titles. One can only wonder if story and cover art were being contracted out in a haphazard manner and the results were uncoordinated in this way. Such poor synchronization between cover art and story content was pretty common in *Pre-Code Horror Comics!*

Fantastic Fears #4 offers *Devil's Sketch Book,* introduced by the Hexmaster. This vaguely interesting character is another Ajax horror host who *never* appears again. The tale has panels which look like the work of Bob Powell—but I'm not *certain* of this. Powell, a fine artist, maintained his *own* studio and many stories attributed to him are the composite work of several unknown artists. I would love to hear from anyone who can credit this story with certainty.

Issue #5 is very interesting in that it contains a story, *Stretching Things,* written by Bruce Hamilton (editor of modern-day comics company Hamilton Comics) and drawn by Steve Ditko. The Overstreet Price Guide has noted this tale of a crook with "Plastic Man" type powers as the *"1st Ditko story."* It may or not be; his work in Prize's **Black Magic** comics may be earlier. But this notation has made **Fantastic Fears #5** an extremely *difficult* comic book to find. It took me over six years to locate a copy and I have yet to be able to find a *second* one. Bruce Hamilton relates the background of how this story bounced from Gilmor to Ajax-Farrell in a letter in **TTTTT #2.** (How's that for a back issue plug!?)

Fantastic Fears #6 contains *Hollow Horror,* the notorious *"decapitation by paper cutter story"* offered here in its entirety. *'Nuff said.* Issue #7 offers an unusual tale entitled *"I, The Coffin":* a "first person" account of the "life" of an oak casket from living tree to final burial. Philosophically profound and spiritually moving *perhaps,* but not particularly *horrifying!*

Finally, **issue #9** offers a nifty little horror story: *Deadly Wish,* in which Satan teases poor Wilbur Cox (who looks similar to the Wilbur Cummings who meets Satan in **Haunted Thrills #18**) by alternately providing and denying him wealth and power until he cracks!

Voodoo

Voodoo is the *odd* sister of the Ajax horror line. While the title *cannot* be denied classification as a horror comic, at least a dozen pure jungle and crime stories appear in the pages of its 19 issues. That isn't *so* bad: fewer than half a story per issue, on average. But it's a lot more than can be found in **Haunted Thrills,** etc. I suspect **Voodoo** was targeted to a *multi*-faceted market: while primarily designed for the horror fan, its publisher also hoped to rope in the jungle, crime and *Good Girl Art* fanatics.

The jungle stories, several with fine Matt Baker art, appear mostly in the first eight issues. These tend to be a bit "pricey" in the **Overstreet Guide:** early issues of **Voodoo** are among the most expensive Ajax comics. (**Voodoo #2** guides for twice the price of **Haunted Thrills #2**—the only reason I can figure is the Rulah reprint story by Baker.) While they are all *excellent* horror comics, and Baker's *Good Girl Art* is among the *best* ever printed under comic book covers, I would tend to recommend the other Ajax titles as *better* buys for the budget-minded *Pre-Code Horror* fan.

A thief acquires *Plastic Man* powers in Ditko's *Stretching Things* **(Fantastic Fears #5)**

From *Corpses of the Jury* (**Voodoo #5**)

Voodoo #5 offers a particularly graphic tale of concentration camp horror: *Corpses of the Jury*. The evil Nazi commandant ends up flayed alive by the ghosts of his victims. Interesting how *Pre-Code Horror* publishers would frequently use the death camps as subject matter for horror stories but almost invariably they never identified the camp inmates as Jews or Gypsies or Poles or Slavs, etc. (The notable exception is the Bernie Krigstein *all-universe* classic *Master Race* from EC's **Impact #1.** A story in a league all to itself, as horror comics go!) I guess politics and horror story-telling just don't mix!

Voodoo #6 contains *Killer Lady, a* story with some very *un*-ladylike decapitated heads. This tale, drawn by an artist which I'm still trying to identify (with the initials "JD"), violates Ajax's unwritten taboo against showing gore.

About as *graphic* a panel as you'll ever see in an Ajax-Farrell horror comic! — From **Voodoo #6.**

Voodoo #7 offers a super story (with the singularly dull title *Goodbye... World!)* about an invasion of our world by Harpies from Outer Space. *Super* splash! (See next page.) This artist's bizarre and moody work appears repeatedly in *Pre-Code Horror Comics* yet I've been unable to identify him by name. Anyone out there know his *moniker? (Free* 6-issue sub to **TTTTT** for the first person to identify him with proof!)

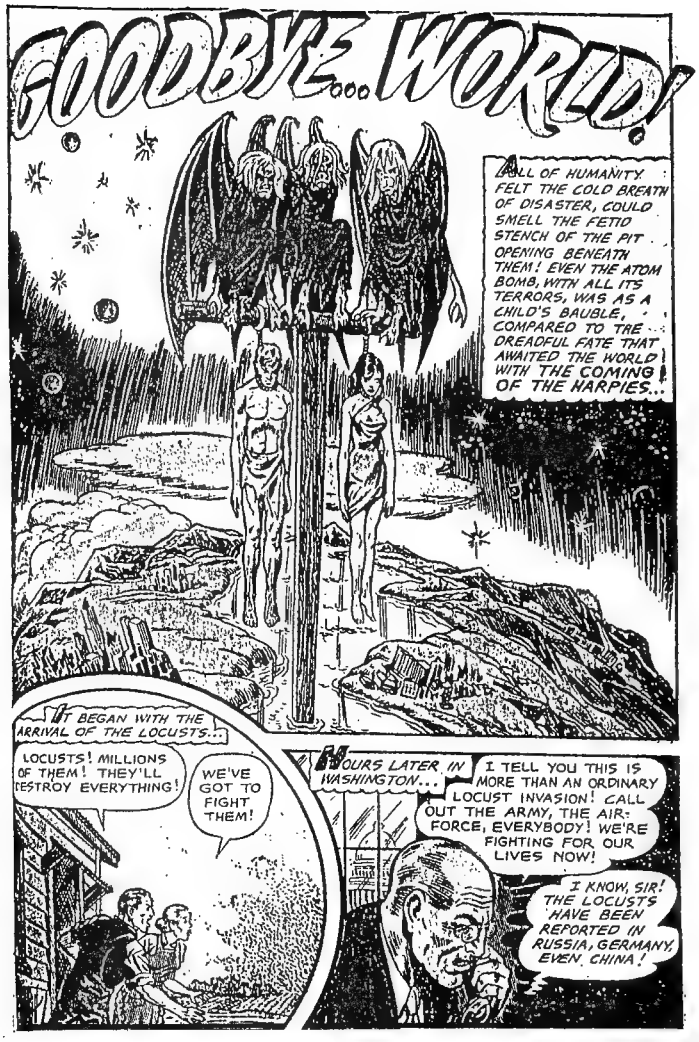
In **Voodoo #8,** we encounter more bloody severed heads in *The Ghostly Guillotine,* as well as a killer robot toy in *Satan's Plaything. Dollar$ and Doom* offers some superb Matt Baker art in a horrific crime story. *Hmmm...* these early issues of **Voodoo** *are* pretty good, after all... might well be worth the money. *Hmmm...*

Voodoo #10 offers *Mask of the Monster,* an interesting tale about a comic script writer working for fictional Acme Comix. The writer's abilities are being severely criticized by the editor, who just happens to be a woman. That's odd *by itself:* in the world of 1950's comic publishing, very few female comics professionals were to be found. Of course, the fact that RUTH ROCHE was the Editor at Ajax-Farrell might have something to do with it! This smacks of being a kind of *inside joke!* The story in itself isn't all that great: what's of interest is the self-referential nature of this comic story: in this era, it's *rare!*

In **Voodoo #11,** *The King of Hades* is about a gangster who tries to outsmart Satan and muscle into the devil's territory. He *fails.* (Whatta surprise— *eh?)*

Issue #14 contains *Corpse... Coast to Coast,* the fascinating saga of a world takeover by the **United World of Zombies!** The *Undead* discover the advantages of unionization, and, with the use of nuclear weapons (which, as is explained, *"can't kill zombies, of course, because they're already dead"),* make the world safe for ZOMBIOCRACY. Wacko, wacko, *wacko...* but *great!* In **Voodoo #16's** *Horror Unlimited,* little demon-like creatures called *Wudgies* seduce some kids *(Look, Daddy! Aren't they cute! We love 'em!!)* and drive their parents crazy with their malicious antics.

The **Voodoo Annual** is one of a small group of over-sized 25-cent horror reprint comics to come out in the 1950's. (Note for young comics historians: in those days, all regular comics sold for a *dime!) "Reprint"* is a misnomer here: actually, several coverless comics were glued together under a new cover as a means of disposing of unsold leftovers. **Voodoo Annual #1** (96 pages plus covers) contains three comics (all first issues): **Haunted Thrills #1, Strange Fantasy #2 (#1)** and **Voodoo #1.** Actually, Ajax was kinda cheap: EC's annuals offer *four* comics (128 pages) for the same price!



Space Harpies invade the Earth in this story by an *Unknown Master!* **(Voodoo #7)**

Upon the *Comics Code,* **Voodoo** became **Vooda** with #20. **Vooda** is an all-jungle comic starring Vooda, sexy Jungle Girl. Lots of fine art by Baker. But *not* a horror comic so *enough* said, already!

Vooda was the only remnant from the world of Ajax-Farrell horror comics to survive when the *Comics Code* devastated **Pre-Code Horror** in 1955. And what an *inadequate* remnant it was! Given the degree of censorship in comics with the *Code,* I'm actually *glad* that none of these great Ajax horror titles survived in mindlessly bowdlerized form. Ajax did introduce the previously-mentioned "mystery" titles (and "mystery" is a *generous* adjective, here!) in 1957 under the Steinway and America's Best publisher names. None of these lasted very long: so sadly concludes the line of **AJAX-FARRELL** *Pre-Code Horror Comics.*

Ajax horror comics had an occasional touch of *levity* as evidenced below (*Cry from the Coffin*—**Strange Fantasy #8)**

Comic Media published 27 horror comics in 3 titles from September 1952 to December 1954:

Horrific #1-13 . . . . . Sep 52-Sep 54
Title changes to:
Terrific #14 . . . . . Dec 54
Weird Terror #1-13 . . . . . Sep 52-Sep 54

Comic Media published only two horror titles (basically): **Horrific** and **Weird Terror. Horrific** changed title to **Terrific** for one issue in late 1954: a title change due to the coming *Comics Code* ban on the title "*Horror*". **Terrific #14** is NOT *Code*-approved.

The first two issues of **Horrific** have the legal publisher of Artful Publications, Inc. With #3, the publisher becomes Harwell Associates, Inc. The last issue, #13, and **Terrific #14** appear under the ownership of Mystery Publishing Company, Inc. at the same address as Harwell. All issues of **Weird Terror** appear under the name of Allen Hardy Associates, Inc. The neat Comic Media emblem shown above does not start appearing on covers until **Weird Terror #4** (March '53) and **Horrific #7** (Sept '53). **Weird Terror** is subtitled "*Ghostly Tales of Spine-Chilling Horror*" through its run. From #3-on, **Horrific** bears the cover blurb "*Weird Tales of Terror*" until its title change is reflected in a new blander one: "*Thrills*Action*Adventure*".

The first two issues of **Horrific** are very different from the *rest* of the run. The logo design is dramatically changed with #3; the work of Don Heck—the artist who, as you shall see, is most strongly identified with Comic Media—does not appear anywhere in **Horrific #1** or **#2.** Clearly, a real *change* in editorial as well as ownership capacity took place between Artful Publications and Harwell Associates. Check the cover reproductions elsewhere in this **TTTTT** to see what I mean.

Beyond that, what does all this legal mumbo jumbo mean? *Beats me!* I'm still struggling with understanding all the abstruse issues of corporate ownership of comic publishers. What's noteworthy is that the ownership statements published in **Weird Terror #9** and **Horrific #9** demonstrate that the corporate situation notwithstanding, Allen B. Hardy is the "publisher" of both titles. Furthermore, this statement credits Dearfield Publishing Co., Inc. as one of the corporate owners. This same corporation is credited as having an interest in ownership statements in all four Ajax-Farrell publications. Thus is the extent of my investigation into the murky world of background relationships between these **Pre-Code Horror** publishers! Stay tuned for more details...

In terms of style, Comic Media is quite different from Ajax-Farrell. Comic Media did not use the *Iger Shop* and many of its stories may be credited to specific freelance artists by style and/or signature. (No Ajax-Farrell story is *ever* signed.) The majority of the stories are done by the workhouse artist known even to modern Marvel fans as Don Heck. Heck drew and signed every cover of **Horrific, Terrific** and **Weird Terror** (with the exception of the first two **Horrifics**). Heck stories appear in most issues of **Weird Terror** and a couple of **Horrific**'s. While Heck isn't the *greatest* artist on earth... *heck!*, his style works wonderfully in the world of Comic Media horror!

Other noteworthy artists whose stuff appears under the Comic Media emblem include Rudy Palais, Marty Elkin, Bill Discount, A.C. Hollingsworth and Pete Morisi. Plus a couple whose first names are unknown to me: *Mr.* Kirk and *Mr.* Tewks. Palais is easily the *best* of the bunch: his work, invariably showing disgustingly maladjusted human beings who perspire at the drop of... well, at the drop of a corpse (which is pretty *common* event in these comics!)... is *Pre-Code* comic book horror at its *best.* Palais is almost unknown and badly underrated by comic fans. To combat this injustice, I offer a complete checklist of his Comic Media work. (Palais also worked for Harvey Comics—among other publishers—that checklist will appear in future.)

Rudy Palais Comic Media Checklist:

One story in each issue unless noted. * denotes reprint from earlier issue.

Horrific #5, 7, 8*, 9-12
Terrific #14*
Weird Terror #1, 5, 6, 8(2 stories), 10*, 11 (text illo),12

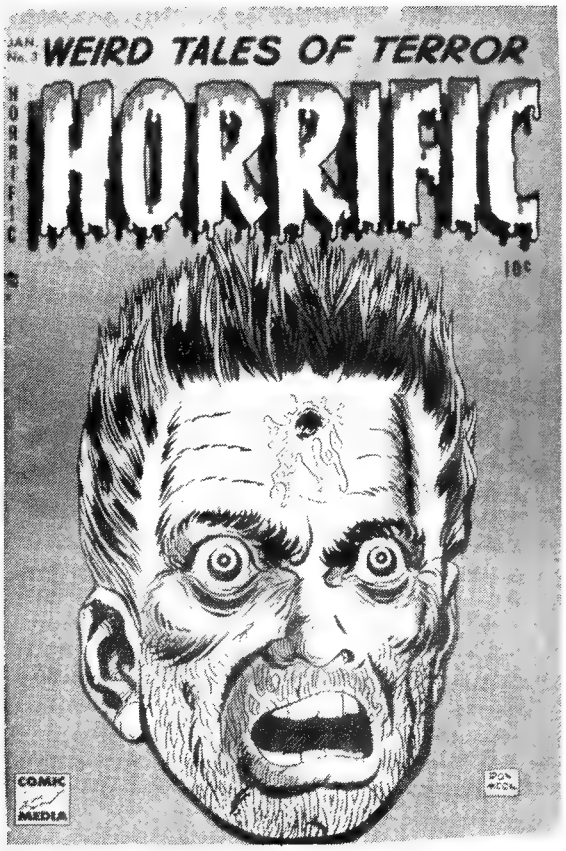
The story in both **Horrific #5** and **Weird Terror #10** is *Death Kiss,* a classic which we presented in **TTTTT #3.** Note that the story has been *re*-colored. The robot woman who kisses the mad scientist to death wears a red dress in **Horrific** and a yellow dress in **Weird Terror.** *Sneaky, sneaky!*

Rudy Palais at his sweaty *extreme!*
From *Mirror Image* in **Weird Terror #8**

Comic Media also is different from many **Pre-Code Horror** publishers in that the company's one and two-page text stories are actually *worth* reading! Publishers in the 1950's included two pages of text in their comics because postal rates were cheaper for subscriptions of periodicals containing two pages of text matter. For most publishers, this text was "throwaway." *Nobody read it.* Comic Media text features can be great! I'll note some of the better ones in my title-by-title reviews.

Comic Media also included a letter column entitled *Coffin Corner* in **Horrific** as part of that title's text content, in later issues. While this correspondence never got too profound, it offered contact between reader and creator rare in this era.

Another interesting Comic Media specialty was the use of *horror hosts.* While these emcee types couldn't hold the drool cup of a Crypt-Keeper or an Old Witch, they do lend a certain amount of *character* to the company's output. The first and chief host, the *Teller of Tales,* is introduced in **Horrific #8.** In the next issue, his underlings are presented: *Freddy Demon, Garry Ghoul, Victor Vampire* and *Walter Werewolf.* Okay, sure, so the names *are* lame! So are the *characters!* Most stories in subsequent issues are offered by one or more of these *half-pint horror hosts.* Note that these masters of ceremony *never* appear in **Weird Terror.** That, along with the fact that most Don Heck stories show up in **Weird Terror,** leads me to believe that there



Horrible **Horrific #3**

The first two **Horrific's** are interesting in that they are so different from subsequent issues. Even the logo design changes dramatically. **Horrific #3** is infamous as the *"bullet-in-the-head"* cover which was the very first reprinted in the *Cover Gallery* in **TTTTT #1.** Okay, *okay,* the cover's so neat we'll run it again here. *The Silent Clock* is a wacky science fiction tale wherein a hapless couple is inexplicably transported to the dinosaur age: as the husband puts it... *"fifty thousand years ago!"* Talk about your *bad* science: dinosaurs haven't walked the earth since... well, try fifty *million* years! Actually, this story may have set a record: *Five* factual errors in *four* panels. Count 'em: (1) The tall dinosaur is *NOT* a brontosaurus. (2) The short one is *NOT* a "tyrannasaurus." (3) Tyrannasaurus is misspelled. (4) Brontosaurus didn't eat meat. (5) Dinosaurs were *long* extinct 50,000 years ago. *Yow!* This issue also contains *Forbidden World,* a straight space opera tale. The *sci-fi-heavy* format of this **Horrific** is never repeated.

Horrific #4 contains a tale, *Hating Corpse,* where a guy is shot in the forehead on the second page, and spends the rest of the story walking around seemingly unfazed with blood draining from the resultant large hole. Yes, you may note that the cover to **Horrific #3** would fit well with this issue. (See my earlier Ajax-Farrell discussion of cover synchronization!) *Ring of Death* in this issue is a fine piece of artwork by A.C. Hollingsworth, another one of my favorite "unknown" *Pre-Code* artists. Finally, the text piece *"How to Embalm a Corpse"* reeks for itself!

Horrific #6 has a story, *Pen Pal!,* with a great full-page opening splash. This degree of daring originality is exceedingly rare in the 1950's. Despite the huge output of comics at this time, certain stylistic formulas (such as beginning the story with a line of panels along the bottom of the first page) went virtually unchallenged by even the *most* creative artists.

Horrific #9 introduces the before-mentioned team of horror hosts—*silly* as they may be. This issue also contains a superb

was a certain amount of editorial independence and separation between the two sister titles: sisters but not by any means *twins.*

Note that we did *not* run any Comic Media stories in this issue of **TTTTT.** This apparent oversight is the result of having set the content of this issue before its *Terrology* feature was completed. Also, we have NO original artwork from Comic Media and at the time the story selection was established, we were less confident of our ability to reproduce from the printed page. However, we did present the previously-mentioned classic *Death Kiss* in **TTTTT #3.** And I promise to offer at least one more Comic Media classic next issue. *Fair 'nuff?*

Okay, enough *generalities!* Here're some specific recommendations about issues you should check out. Please note that all Comic Media comics are *relatively* inexpensive as **Pre-Code Horror** comics go. Those I recommend here are *especially* worth the bucks!

Horrific

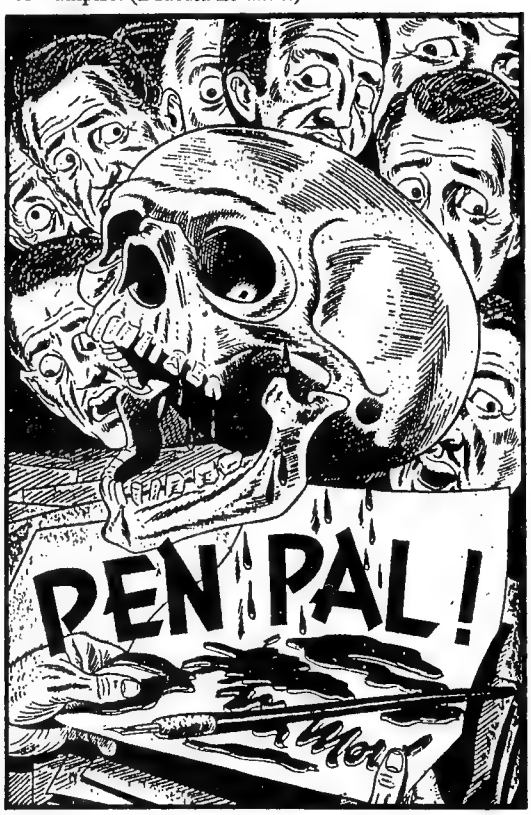
The cover design of **Horrific** is fairly consistent from issue to issue: each offers a stunning full-face closeup of either a victim or a perpetrator of some horrible event! **Weird Terror,** on the other hand, features more complex covers with more background and character interaction.

Batting *OVER* **1.000!** *FIVE* factual errors in *FOUR* panels on the *same* page!

Another guy with a hole in his head!
From *Hating Corpse* in **Horrific #4.**

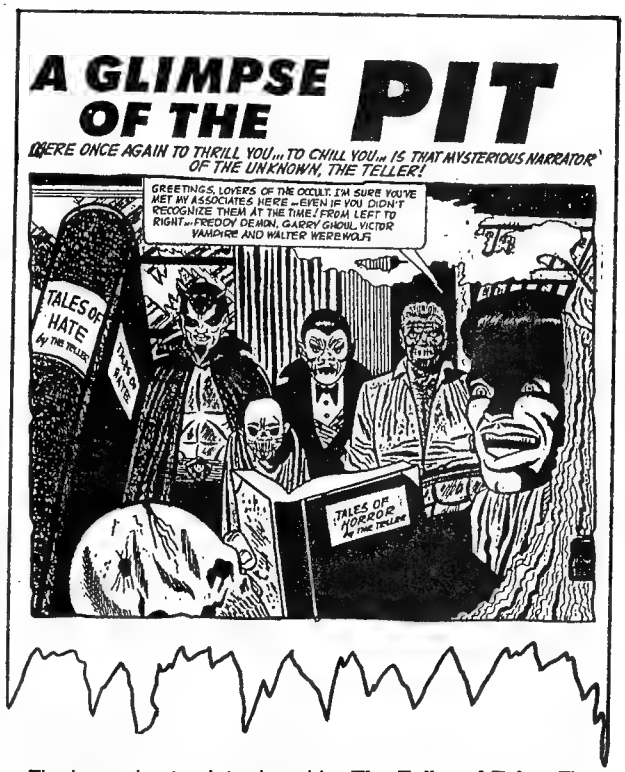
Rudy Palais story: The *Wolves of Midnight*. While Don Heck drew the *most* stories for Comic Media, Palais's work is the *best!*

The **12th issue** contains another fine Palais story, *The Deadliest Witch,* a creepy tale of backwoods cannibalism. This story showcases Palais in a more *tempered* style: these characters don't sweat nearly as much as some of his more frenetic heroes and villains! Plus, Marty Elkin's *Blood Lust* is the *origin* story of Victor Vampire. (Dracula he *ain't!)*



The only *full-page* splash ever to appear from Comic Media.

Horrific turned into **Terrific** for one uninspired issue. This comic was NOT *Code*-approved, despite the title change. Apparently, Comic Media could not escape its own history of storytelling excesses with such a simple *disguise!* For years, the **Overstreet Guide** listed *three* issues of **Terrific:** #s 14 *through* #16. Well, it's now clear that there is *NO* #15; and **Terrific #16** does appear in the indicia of *a* comic book: that comic's cover and the entire contents feature a mediocre super-hero called **Wonder Boy.** (Can't tell ya how *long* I looked for those two *non-existent* horror comics!) Incidentally, if you care anymore about corporate ownership of these titles: **Wonder Boy** continued for two more issues under the Ajax-Farrell logo.



The horror hosts—introduced by **The Teller of Tales.** The Teller *first* appears in **Horrific #8;** *this* scene is from **#9.**

Weird Terror

Weird Terror covers include some of the most gruesome ever printed in comics. All of issues #5 through 9 all offer some kind of terrifying murder or battle-to-the-death scene, complete with hideous monsters and appropriately bloody and horrifying consequences. The cover of issue #8 appears on the back cover here as well as in the *Gallery* in **TTTTT #1;** that of issue #6 appears in **TTTTT #3.** *(More* back issue plugs!)

In **Weird Terror #1,** Hitler returns from the dead to plague a disloyal Nazi colonel in *Hitler's Head!* The story ends with a four-line poetry quote from the *Rubáiyát* by Omar Khayyám. And who says comics *ain't* educational—eh?!

Weird Terror #4 contains a two-page text feature with useful information about cannibalism, torture, satanism and sadism. Gee, the things you can learn in funnybooks... See what I mean about *edjukayshunnall?*

Issue #6 contains a Kenneth Landau story, *Decapitation,* wherein Homer Bobbie kills his wife in frustration over her ob-

The witch's lover gets stabbed in the back in this Rudy Palais story, *The Deadliest Witch,* from **Horrific #12.**

session with radio quiz shows. Subsequently appearing on such a program (*probably* on the station W*H*A*D*E*S), he wins first prize: his wife's head! *Yuck...*

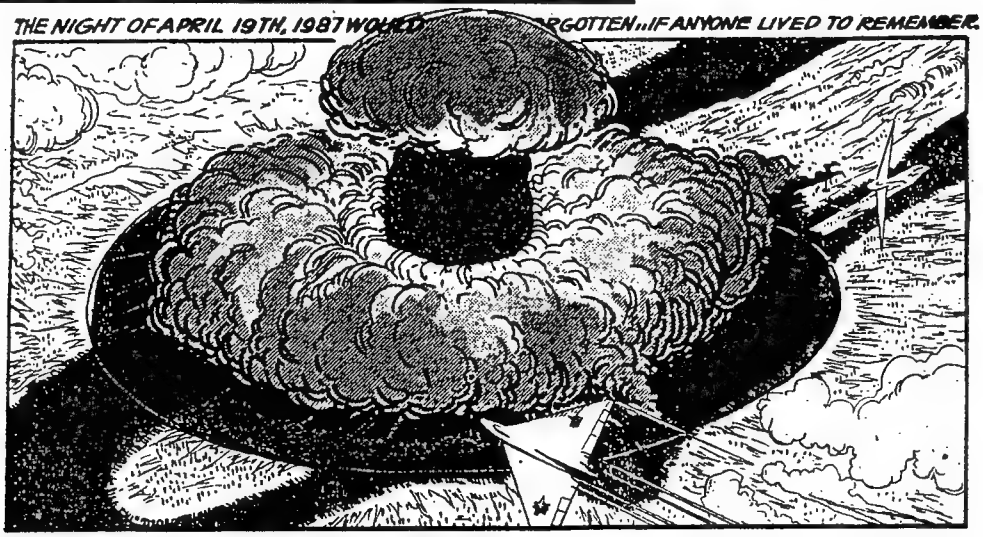
Weird Terror #8 offers another quintessential Rudy Palais story: *Mirror Image,* a panel of which has appeared earlier. (Boy, it's incredible how tame and lame Comic Media story *titles* can be!) In this tale, rich, old and obnoxious Uncle Hugo is plagued by a killer rattlesnake in his bed. He dies... but *not* from snakebite. Therein lies a surprise ending. The surprise isn't *all* that great... but the art is pure Palais at his *extremest!* Check out the sweat streams! This issue contains another Palais story about a boxer and Marty Elkin's *The Improved Kiss,* a chronology of the greatest murderers of history: from the Borgias family to Hitler (of course!)

The Hitler "clones" die in the last panel of *Hitler's Head.* From **Weird Terror #1.** Note the quote from Omar Khayyám.

Weird Terror #11 contains an atomic disaster story by Bill Discount entitled *Day of Doom.* Nuclear horror stories were pretty common during the *Pre-Code Horror* era: also known as the height of the *Cold War.* This story predicts thermonuclear war and the resulting post-apocalyptic horror starting April 19, 1987. Lucky for us this prophet was wrong! (Or maybe just *early?)*

Needless to say, **Weird Terror,** with a cover featuring *three* banned words, never survived the advent of the *Comics Code*—even in censored-to-death form. More's the pity. Neither did Comic Media. The publisher's entire meager line—including a western comic and a couple of crime comics—*all* died in 1954.

The nuclear explosion panel below is from Comic Media's *only* atomic disaster tale: *Day of Doom* from **Weird Terror #11.**



One *last* comment about Comic Media and reprints. A number of **Pre-Code Horror** publishers succumbed to the temptation of *reprinting* their own stories in the interest of saving money. In self-justification, they might argue, the population of comic fans *turns over* so fast that a story reprinted a couple of years later is unlikely to be recognized by fans most of whom had only become readers in the last few months. But you won't find such excuses accepted *here!* Comic Media, along with Gilmor, was one of the *worst* offenders. About 10% of Comic Media's stories were reprinted from one title to the other. In **Terrology**, I will be cross-referencing all such reprints... so let the guilty publishers *beware!* Shame and embarrassment will come upon them... even if somewhat *belatedly!*

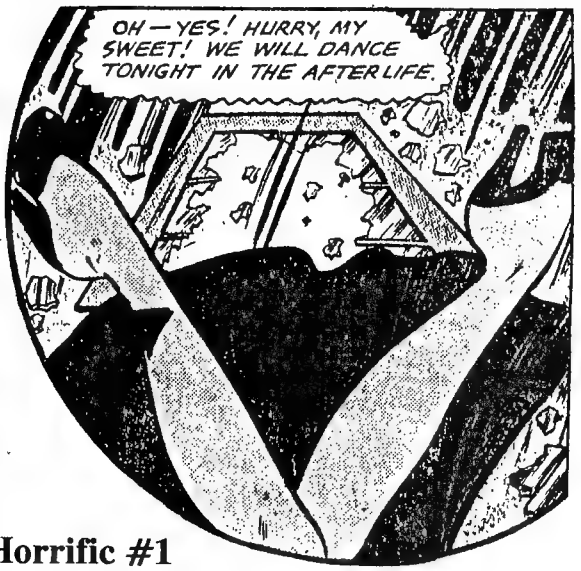
Below you'll find some interesting artwork from various Ajax-Farrell and Comic Media comics: artwork for which I could find no room in the previous discussion. This issue's *Cover Gallery*, while not being limited solely to these two publishers, includes a number of interesting covers from the companies' output. Finally, the back cover of **TTTTT #4** features full-color repros of nine choice Ajax-Farrell and Comic Media *masterpieces!*

Next issue, we'll direct the **Terrology** microscope onto two more *Pre-Code Horror Publishers*. While I reserve the right to change my mind, current plans are to investigate:

STORY & QUALITY

See you in three months... or *thereabouts!*

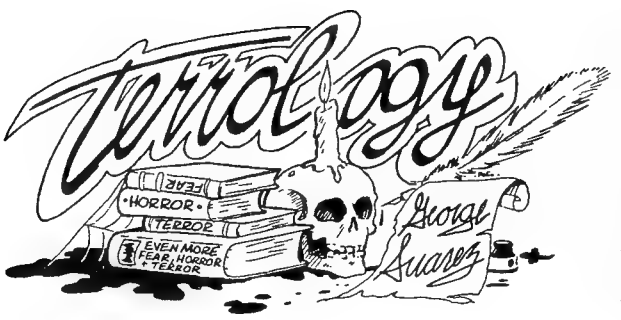
Weird Terror #7



Horrific #1

Voodoo #16

Haunted Thrills #5



Chapter Five:

Story Comics

(includes Master, Merit)

Mysterious Adventures #1-23 . . . . Mar 51-Dec 54
#24,25 Code-approved.

Dark Mysteries #1-22 . . . . . Jun 51-Mar 55
*#23,24 Code-approved.**

Fight Against Crime #1-21 . . . . . May 51-Sep 54
Becomes Fight Against the Guilty for #22 and the Code-approved final issue, #23.

*I believe that *THERE IS NO* **DM #25,** despite what both Overstreet and the Gerber Photo Guide contend. This *non*-existent comic should rate a lot higher than "8" on Gerber's rarity scale—non-existent comics are really, *really* rare!

We continue our in-depth look at specific *Pre-Code Horror Comics* with **STORY COMICS,** one of the most interesting and prolific publishers of the era. Originally, I intended to cover both Story and Quality this issue. But once I got "into" the subject, it became clear to me that Story deserves the entire *Terrology* slot. We'll save Quality for another day.

Story Comics was born in March 1951 with **Mysterious Adventures,** a title which ran for 25 bi-monthly issues through August 1955. (All Story comics were bi-monthly.) The last two issues were Code-approved; the Pre-Code title ended with #23, cover-dated December 1954.

The sister title, **Dark Mysteries,** started in June of 1951 and followed a very similar course. **Dark Mysteries** lasted 24 issues through March 1955. The last two issues were Code-approved too, meaning that the title ended its Pre-Code history with #22, dated March 1955. (Actually, the indicia says March 1954 but, as the Overstreet Price Guide notes correctly, this *is* a mistake.)

The "Story" name and/or logo *NEVER* appears on any comic published for the company. *Brand identification* these guys weren't into! In fact, the Story name doesn't even appear in the indicia of **Dark Mysteries:** that title's corporate ownership is listed as Master Comics and then later, Merit Comics. Why do I deduce that the titles are related? We'll get to that shortly...

I consider **Mysterious Adventures** to be Story's "flagship" horror title since it ran for one more issue and started three months earlier. However, beyond that, there isn't much with which to tell these the two titles apart: while not exactly "twins", they were produced by mostly the same people and are quite similar in format and style. If you ask me directly which title to choose, were you to be limited to one or the other... well, I'd go with **Mysterious Adventures.** It has the greater share of the best Story horror stories and a few other interesting features which we'll discuss. But it's a *close* call!

Let's take a look at the corporate ownership situation with these titles. As mentioned, the "Story Comics" name, found in the indicia of every issue of **Mysterious Adventures,** *never* appears in the pages of **Dark Mysteries.** The first 21 issues of the latter are credited to Master Comics, Inc. Code-approved issues #23 and #24, and the transition issue #22, credit Merit Publications, Inc. as publisher. However, an ownership statement in #23 continues to claim Master as the corporate owner. A close review of the annual ownership statements reveals that the owners of Story, Master and Merit are the same people. Hence my reasonable conclusion that these are sister titles.

As I discussed last *Terrology,* my struggle to unravel the behind-the-scenes connections between *Pre-Code Horror* publishers is an ongoing one. I find myself torn between the desire to share the fascinating aspects of this detective-style analysis and the need to avoid boring readers with the potentially tedious detail. I suspect that these companies may have been related to three other horror and crime publishers: Ribage, Trojan and Youthful Magazine. But since I have yet to conclude on these connections, I'm not crediting Story with any more titles at present. In the long run, what determines the "sister" status of horror titles is common creative personnel and style—not legal paperwork, and in those respects, as you shall see, **Dark Mysteries** and **Mysterious Adventures** are the *closest* of sisters.

Hey, we've forgotten about one *more* sibling: **Fight Against Crime,** published under the Story Comics name for its entire run, lasted 21 issues from May 1951 through September 1954. Like its *(half-?)*sisters, **Fight Against Crime** survived for two issues as Code-approved, #s 22 and #23 coming out under the banner **Fight Against the Guilty;** the last issue appearing March, 1955. Those of you who don't know *why* the title was changed by now should do some homework and refer to my *Terrology* column in earlier issues of **Tales Too Terrible.** (Clue: The Comics Code specifically banned certain incendiary words from the title of comic books. Guess which one in this case?)

Fight Against Crime began as a "pure" crime comic. Its first four issues bore the subtitle: "*Thrilling Crime Cases*" and "*Exciting Crime Cases.*" Starting with #5, in response to the horror craze sweeping 1950's comics readership, the cover blurb changed to "*Horror and Suspense*" and by #18, "*Horror and Terror.*" These changes reflect its development into a crime comic with horror overtones and the occasional "pure" horror story. I should explain that Story's approach to horror was *different* from that of the two publishers discussed last issue. Ajax and Comic Media employed many "classic" horror themes: medieval and ancient settings, murky moors, creepy castles, witches, demons and ghosts. Story's style (particularly from 1953-on) tends to be based more on contemporary themes: horror often emerges from scenes of daily life, from the interaction of ordinary people. This style lends itself to a *blending* of horror and crime themes since criminal activity is very often quite hor-

TERROLOGY

TERROLOGY is the name of an **Index/Collector's Guide to the Pre-Code Horror Comics** which will be written by me and published by NEC sometime in the next couple of years. This book will be a complete and detailed review of every horror comic published prior to the advent of the *Comics Code* in 1955. *Terrology* will be compiled via direct access to copies of every such comic and will, I hope, include hundreds of full color cover repros as well as representative interior art. This work will be intended as a "scholarly" examination of an important period in the history of the development of the comic book. While accessible by all, *Terrology* will be specifically targeted toward the serious collector/fan of *Pre-Code Horror.* In the meantime, while **TTTTT** comes out quarterly, *Terrology* will appear as the title of a column in which I will attempt to provide the comic reader with some basic background info about the fascinating world of 1950's **Pre-Code Horror Comics.**

rific. This isn't to say that supernatural elements don't appear in Story's output. The company offers more than a few vampire, werewolf and ghost stories—a couple even appear in **Fight Against Crime.** But not as many as in Ajax and Comic Media.

Is **Fight Against Crime** truly a *horror comic,* you ask? The first few issues were certainly not *intended* to be. After that..., well, you *do* ask a tough question. **FAC** is closer in style to Story's horror comics than **Crime Suspenstories** is to EC's. The editors and writers certainly intended and hoped to satisfy reader demand for horror stories with **Fight Against Crime.** As you'll see when we discuss the title in detail shortly, a strong case may be made either way. Ultimately, I do intend to include the title in *Terrology* for at least three reasons: (1) **Fight Against Crime** delivers more *good* stories containing horrific elements than many titles from other publishers which blatantly present themselves as horror comics, (2) The title is so *interesting* that I feel duty-bound to proclaim its merits to all fans of esoteric comics, and (3) It's *my* book so I get to do what I want with it. That's fair, right? And I'm not being totally facetious. Ultimately, a lot of this kind of classification debate (including in many fields far beyond comics) is resolved by resort to arbitrary decision-making. After all, Story wasn't worrying about this question when they published **Fight Against Crime.**

What *kind* of comics did Story publish? Pretty *good* ones. As you'll rapidly come to see, Most horror fans will enjoy Story's output and I can give the material high recommendation, since for the most part, back issues are NOT expensive. In terms of comparison to Ajax and Comic Media covered last issue..., well, Story never reprinted any of its tales so the reader never gets gypped by reprints. (We'll talk about Story's penchant for *SWIPERY* in a few paragraphs!) Story did not use a studio, nor maintain a "house style" like Ajax and Superior did. Over 60% of Story artists *are* identifiable. In fact, virtually everybody who "counts" signs his work. (One notable exception is the "MYSTERY ARTIST", a capable craftsman whose unsigned work appears in several issues of all three Story titles. I won't identify him in this issue of *Terrology*. I *will* discuss his work, and reprint a few panels, in these pages. The first person to write in and correctly identify this artist will win a free six-issue sub to **TTTTT!**) In terms of general production standards, with minor exceptions, Story's quality is quite *high.*

Okay, let's move onto a title-by-title/issue-by-issue discussion of Story's fascinating output. Please note that while this approach is the most practical and I will be using it in every *Terrology* column, its weak point is evident in discussing publisher characteristics which *cut across* titles. The prefatory material above is an attempt to offset some of this problem. I will continue to bring up such cross-title subjects (for example: the "Canadian printing connection" mentioned shortly) in the body of what follows, whenever necessary.

Mysterious Adventures

As noted, this is Story's *flagship* title. It's probably true that not every horror publisher had a flagship per se, but I like to assign the status to one title for every multi-title publisher, and I haven't had any problem finding one so far. (For example, despite the close similarity between EC's three horror titles, I consider **Tales from the Crypt** to be EC's flagship. Why? Well, **TftC** came *first,* it ran one *more* issue than **Vault** and two more than **Haunt,** and its final issue was EC's *last* horror comic. Any counter arguments?)

Stories like Doug Wildey's *Horror of the Clutching Hand* are solid evidence that **Fight Against Crime** may be classified as a horror, or at least a horror/crime, comic book. This tale is from **issue #6,** well before the complete "transition" to EC imitation—discussed shortly.

The first two issues of **Mysterious Adventures** depict a logo design very similar to DC's **Strange Adventures.** Whether this led to the heated exchange of legal letters is lost in the sands of time. Suffice to say that by **issue #3,** the design had been altered. *Mysteriously* enough, #3 is also about a 1/4" wider than the previous two issues. A one-issue aberration, you say? NOT! This third issue came out about the same time as **Dark Mysteries #1.** *That* comic is also about a 1/4" wider. What's really interesting here is that starting at this time, both titles were printed in Canada. (I know this from the bold PRINTED IN CANADA notation both in the indicia and along the spine of the first page.) This continued for seven consecutive issues apiece of both titles: **Mysterious Adventures #3-9** and **Dark Mysteries #1-7** were all printed north of the border. After that, both titles return to American production with a shrinkage back down to *pre*-Canada size.

What's all this mean? *Beats me!* It's just more interesting trivia about *Pre-Code Horror* comics. Complicating the issue is that the 2nd through 8th issues of **Fight Against Crime** appearing during this time, were all printed in the U.S.A. So if there were economic reasons for transferring the printing of these comics to a foreign country, the powers-that-be at Story did not consider them relevant to a crime title. Were they afraid that Canadian printers and/or authority figures would object more to the content of a crime comic than a horror comic? While crime comics had an odious reputation in some circles in these times, the perceived scent wasn't notably worse than that for horror comics, so we find ourselves at a loss to explain this anomaly.

In terms of *style,* **Mysterious Adventures** begins as a fairly *innocuous* horror comic. The first six issues are subtitled *"Strangest Tales Ever Heard"* and *"Amazing Tales."* This indicates a muted approach to the genre: an editorial predisposition towards "mystery" rather than "horror." This reinforces my suspicion that this title may have been somewhat inspired by DC's **Strange Adventures** which began about a year earlier. DC's science fiction, "horror" and "crime" comics were very mild compared to the output of the company's smaller competitors. Like all publishers, Story rapidly learned that gore, violence and graphic horror were what sold and both **Mysterious Adventures** and **Dark Mysteries** became more "extreme" with later issues. Starting with #7, the cover blurb on MA reads *"Thrilling Tales of Suspense."* *"Tales of Horror"* is added with #10 and by #18, the cover proclaims loudly *"Thrilling Tales of Terror."* In the world of *Pre-Code Horror,* the intensity of such buzzwords ran progressively as follows: *MYSTERY, SUSPENSE, HORROR, TERROR.* (Remember that EC's Bill Gaines renamed **Crypt of Terror** to **Tales from the Crypt** over concerns that the bold use of the word TERROR on the cover could lead to problems with parents and comic distributors.)

As Story became progressively *more* graphic, the company's output also became much more imitative of EC, the most visibly successful small horror publisher—even to the point, as you'll see, of outright swipery. (I don't state that EC was the most *successful* since Atlas clearly sold many *more* horror comics than EC. But imitating Atlas was much harder since this required duplicating the capital and clout of one of the biggest comics publishers in the country. To small-time companies like Story, EC appeared to be a success story which could be replicated—in *theory,* at least—simply by imitation of content and appearance.) Serious copying of EC's style began with **Mysterious Adventures #13,** complete with (forgettable) horror hosts, copycat splash page formats and story title designs and extensive use of the Leroy mechanical lettering system which

Note the logo change between issues #2 & #4. The "ADVENTURE" in the earlier issue is in classic DC style.

EC's editors used extensively, making it practically their trademark. Oddly enough, Story also changed the **Mysterious Adventures** cover logo with this issue. The old logo returned with #16—but *not* the old-style writing and drawing. Story becomes even *more* imitative of EC and, indeed, directly swiped several EC stories—"thefts" which will be discussed shortly.

Story's editors were apparently aware sufficiently of the concept of plagiarism to downplay imitation of EC's very distinctive and popular horror hosts: The Crypt-Keeper and Co. Consequently, Story's own hosts appear infrequently, have very little personality and are frequently not even named. The resultant effect is often the perception in the reader that Story has ripped off EC's **Crime Suspenstories** and **Shock Suspenstories** (comics *without* hosts) rather than EC's horror titles. This is certainly true of **Fight Against Crime,** several issues of which may be called the **Poor Man's Crime Suspense.**

Okay, *enough* with generalities. Let's look at specific issues. In perusing my collection of Story comics for this column, I find myself obligated to add the same disclaimer I did last month: I could find something interesting to say about nearly *every* issue of these titles. Story put out some fascinating comics and every issue is worthy of recommendation. I will be this complete in my *Terrology* book. In the meantime, I can only provide you with highlights. Please don't pass up an issue simply because I haven't had the space to discuss it here!

While Story's output is generally of *high* quality in terms of production standards, the earlier issues do tend to be weaker. Like many publishers, the company required a few issues to get up and running with making quality comics. **Mysterious Adventures #1** is best remembered for a cover and vampire/monster story by WALTER JOHNSON, a Golden Age *"Good Girl"* artist of some repute. Neither issues #2 nor #3 have much to recommend them other than startlingly bright covers. **Issue #3** is the first printed in Canada and the color registration shows some of the problems typical of Superior's output, all of which was produced in Canada.

Signed stories by A.C. HOLLINGSWORTH appear in **issues #3-5.** Hollingsworth is a noteworthy horror artist with a very variable but distinctively free-wheeling style. **#5's** *Ghouls Feast At Midnight* is an interesting tale about father-and-son ghouls in a classically medieval Bavarian town.

Issues 5 through 7 all feature noteworthy efforts by both Hollingsworth and LOU CAMERON. Cameron's *The Phantom of Lonesome Swamp* in **issue #6** is the best of the bunch, a suspenseful story about treasure seekers battling skeletal swamp monsters only to find useless Confederate money!

Issue #8's *The Eyes of Horror* is the most "shocking" story Story has related to this point—with an *Aliens*-style monster bursting out of the bad guy's eyeball. The tale ends with an inquiry of the reader: "How do your eyes feel? How do they feel right now?" No doubt this *terrified* 1950's comic readers!

In **Mysterious Adventures #9,** the story *Terror of the Lion's Revenge,* drawn by the adequate, ubiquitous but forgettable artist HY FLEISHMAN, gives us our first full-body look at an Old Witch-style horror host who has been making minor introductory appearances in various stories since the second issue. No *name* as of yet. The same one-eyed character is actually talking in **issue #10,** where she (he? *it??*) introduces Fleishman's *The Death Head! Blind Fury,* by an artist I've never heard of named

A treasure-hunter goes down in quicksand to the disdain of his buddies, in a Lou Cameron tale from **Mysterious Adventures #6.**

1950's *Pre-Code Horror* comics rarely talked directly *AT* their readers. Here's a rare example from **MA #8's** *The Eyes of Horror.*

DOYLE COHEN, is about an alcoholic surgeon who butchers an operation on a friend who is *also* a physician. The patient loses his sight and commits suicide as a result. However, he returns from the dead just in time to perform work of similar quality on his drunken colleague who finds himself needing surgery after an auto accident. If this story sounds familiar... it *should*. Its very reminiscent of *Fatal Scalpel*, from Ajax's **Haunted Thrills #5.** The latter story came out about six months afterwards and may well have been "inspired" by the Story story. This kind of swipery is fascinating and identifying instances of the phenomenon is one of the major goals of *Terrology*. More on this and on how fans of *Pre-Code Horror* can help—and get credit for it—will be forthcoming in future issues of **TTTTT.**

Mysterious Adventures #10 also contains a real rarity: a *war* horror story. *The Gun That Fought Back* is a mediocre tale about a machine gun which saves some GI's by mowing down a group of attacking Commies without human involvement. This story lacks "standard" Story lettering and may well have been intended for a war comic. What I find amazing is that horror stories with a war theme are so *uncommon* during an era when the horrors of a real war were being experienced by thousands of American and Allied soldiers every day in Korea. Perhaps these horrors were too close to everyday life to allow inclusion in horror comics?

The **12th** issue of **Mysterious Adventures** cover-features the unnamed horror host we've mentioned above. She (he? *it??)* introduces the lead story, *The Running Ghost*. This is the most *graphic* tale offered in the title to date. Luther is a mortician who makes a little money on the side by selling the bodies he's supposed to be burying to a medical school for anatomy studies. The decapitated heads and severed limbs of some of his "customers", complete with nauseatingly bloody necks and stumps, return to plague his conscience, and subsequently drive him into the path of an oncoming train. Apparently, a decision has been made with this issue to *increase* the degree of horror in this title. The horror is raised even *more* with subsequent issues.

Issue #13's cover bears a logo change and, more importantly, imitation of EC moves into high gear. The lead story, *Life's Blood*, is introduced by a new but as yet still unnamed horror host with the typical EC patter: *"Salutations, Sinners! Come, step inside my steaming cauldron and let me brew you an appetizing plate of HORROR!" Witches Never Die!* features the hanging of a witch and the removal of her heart. Also for the first time, Story offers a HORROR SHORT SHORT, a one-page feature about a debtor returning to avenge himself upon a prosecuting attorney. Three new artists, *Life Blood's* MYSTERY ARTIST, along with MARTY ELKIN and ART GATES, each with a harsher, more grittily realistic style than has been seen in earlier issues of **Mysterious Adventures,** appear in this comic.

Overstreet remarks that the 14th issue has an Old Witch swipe. *'Tis true.* The unnamed witchy hag from #13 returns to welcome readers to *The Haunt of Horror,* where she relates the JOHN D'AGOSTINO tale *Flame Thrower! A Dead Ball* (artist unknown) is a football tale of murder and revenge which appears at least to be *inspired* by the legendary baseball horror story *Foul Play* from EC's **Haunt of Fear #19.** I say "appears" because **MA #14's** indicia reads June 1953 while **HoF #19** is dated May-June 1953. Given creative lead time, a direct swipe seems impossible... *Coincidence? Foul Play* is obviously swiped in **Fight Against Crime #16,** to be discussed later.

Gruesome Story horror hosts introduce a pair of horrific stories, using EC-style sardonic patter, in these panels from **Mysterious Adventures #12 & #14.**

With **issue #15,** this title starts becoming really wild. The next seven issues are all worthy of the attention of fans of "extreme" horror comics. **Issue #15** begins with a cover of a ghoul using a human head as a bowling ball. It gets better (worse?) inside! DOUG WILDEY'S *The Hunter and the Hunted!,* is a familiar *"turnabout is fair play"* plot with a twist. We won't give the surprise ending away, since the story appears in complete form in this TTTTT, other than to say that this is a *(surprisingly)* rare example of a horror comic story whose plot is vaguely reflected on the comic's cover! The MYSTERY ARTIST's *A Toast to Death* is a satisfying tale of suburban conflict between a wimp and his shrew involving poison and culminating in a classic "acid-in-the-face" finale. A second outing by the MYSTERY ARTIST, *Ghoul Crazy,* pits a maniacal strangler against a female ghoul and her "family." *Not* bad! Actually, to make it easier for you collectors to identify the MYSTERY ARTIST, let's provide a complete checklist of his Story Comics horror and crime efforts:

CHECKLIST: *THE MYSTERY ARTIST*

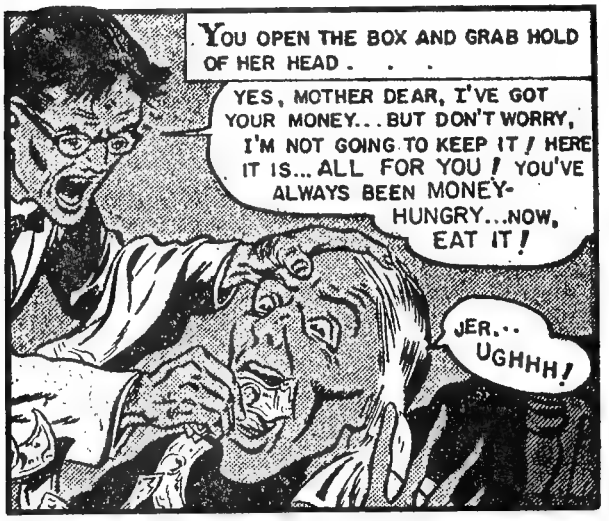
Dark Mysteries #11
Fight Against Crime #11-15, 17 (2@ in 14,15,17)
Mysterious Adventures #13-17,20,22 (2 in #15)

Issue #16 contains *The Ice Man Cometh,* which concludes when Lillian finds that her husband has carved up her boy friend and frozen each part in blocks of ice. (Gee, *hate* to give away these shock endings!) The best story among four good ones in **Mysterious Adventures #17** is *My Brother's Keeper* (how many horror stories have had *this* title, eh?) I won't give away the punch line of this tale except to mention that we don't find out what kind of brothers these two guys are until the last panel... and the kind is very relevant to the action which precedes it. How's *that* for a tease?

Much as I want to skip a few of these issues to save space... I can't! **Issue #18** introduces a host with a name: The Coffin-Keeper— *"all ready to chill your blood with another loathsome tale of horror!" Skin 'Em Alive* is another football rip-off of the *Foul Play* theme. *Bottoms Up* feature some graphically violent interaction between a drunk and his wife culminating in axe blows to the head and body parts ending up in bottles of rye whiskey. Ick! HY FLEISHMAN provides the artistic effort (Fleishman also draws the cover of this comic) for a tale introduced by the aptly-named Corpse, a "nauseating narrative" entitled *String 'Em Up.* Finally, *Ghost Town,* wherein an innocent man wanders into a community dominated by vampires, is a direct ripoff of EC's *Midnight Mess* from **Tales from the Crypt #35.** It even includes the references to vampire food at the local vampire restaurant: before realizing what he's eating, the hapless victim consumes blood cocktail (thinking it's tomato juice) along with fried brains and blood clot ice cream! This neat story has been reprinted completely elsewhere in this TTTTT.

Mysterious Adventures #19 includes a vampire story, a werewolf story (entitled, appropriately, *"Werewolves"),* a story about the devil, and a tale about being buried alive. While not a particularly distinguished issue, the reader certainly gets his money's worth for his (1954) dime— or even for a double sawbuck today!

In **issue #20,** the MYSTERY ARTIST brings you *Ghoulash,* which pits a female vampire (whose habit is to pick up derelicts and then drain them of more than their money) against a pair of hobo vampires. In *Chef's Delight,* the unnamed horror host



Jeremiah gets fed-up with his penny-pinching Momma in *Money Hungry,* from **Mysterious Adventures #14.**

A classically *EC-ish* shock *(shlock?)* final panel from MA **#16's** *The Ice Man Cometh,* by the MYSTERY ARTIST.

welcomes you to the "*Coffin of Terror*" (Hmm... that sounds *familiar)* in a story which concludes with the most gruesome ending in Story Comics' horror output. The panel, reproduced here, requires no text description!

Issue #21 keeps the grisly ball rolling with The MYSTERY ARTIST's *The Choker*, a tale replete with gruesome strangulations and hangings. *Beauty and the Beast* is a *Mother Ghoul's Nursery Tale*, another example of how sincerely Story was flattering EC in these days. This feature continues through the remaining four issues of **Mysterious Adventures.** *Cinderella* in #22 is the only memorable story in that issue. The final Pre-Code issue, #23, offers *Old Mother Lubbard* by Fleishman. *They Never Return* is the only Story appearance by JAY DISBROW, an artist whose work appears everywhere in Star's titles. This story is anomalous; I wonder if it's been reprinted from an old Star comic. Haven't been able to find it yet. *Pandora's Bucks* (get it?), by MANNIE BANKS, is introduced by The Mystery Keeper (the names are being toned down... Do we hear the approaching footfalls of the Comics Code?) with a splash panel which is a blatant JACK DAVIS rip-off.

The last two Code-approved issues of **Mysterious Adventures** require little mention here. The Code's destruction of the horror comic is quite evident in the mix of puerile and emasculated pap to be found in these mags. The only material worthy of note are a couple of mildly humorous *Mother Ghoul's Nursery Tales*, well-drawn by the capable RICHARD DOXSEE (a Will Elder-clone) and in #24, the first Story appearance of artist JOHN FORTE, a capable stylist whose prolific journeyman efforts would become familiar to readers of *Post-Code* ACG and Atlas mystery comics as well as DC's **Superman** family in the early '60s. (To me, Forte is the quintessential **Lois Lane** artist.) Incidentally, these post-Code issues of MA are quite hard to find, particularly in nice shape. I can only assume that in the hysteria of the anti-comics crusade culminating in these days, even toned-down mystery comics didn't sell very well and most copies ended up unsold and destroyed.

Dark Mysteries

MA's "little sister", **Dark Mysteries,** was born three months later; the cover date was June-July 1951. The title followed a similar course. Discussion of the "Canadian connection" may be found above. Like with **Mysterious Adventures,** the early issues of this title are interesting but not *particularly* notable. The first two issues both contain art by masters WALLY WOOD and LOU CAMERON. But I hardly think this justifies the sky-high Price Guide values on these two comics. (I'll take three or four of the later issues in exchange for either of these any day!)

While early issues of **Mysterious Adventures** may have begun with science fiction-*ish* overtones, **DM** was a horror comic from conception. All issues bear the subtitles *Thrilling Tales of Horror & Suspense* and *Eerie Adventures. Weird Tales of Horror* is added starting with **issue #11,** the transition issue (like its contemporary, MA **#13),** wherein EC imitation starts to become corporate policy.

The first appearance of a horror host occurs in **issue #5** wherein an unnamed female ghoul introduces a decent Hy Fleishman story, *Horror of the Ghostly Statue.* Three more unnamed hosts appear in **issue #6.** These are all prototypes for the undead emcees who appear later: The Ghoul, The Coffin-Keeper, etc. **Dark Mysteries #7** contains *The Terror of the Killer Plant,* a fine story by A.C. Hollingsworth, whose work

The ending of *Chef's Delight,* from **MA #20,** is enough to put all but the most iron-stomached horror fans off their feed—at least until they move on to the *next* horror comic!

appears in most subsequent issues. You can't go *too* far wrong picking up any horror comic with a story by good ol' A.C.H.!

Dark Mysteries #9 contains Fleishman's sexy serpent saga entitled *Medusa,* wherein a cowboy falls under the spell of a seductive siren afflicted with greater "problem hair" than most women! At this point, all doubts that these two titles were sisters are eliminated by the repeat appearances of artists-in-common like Wildey, Hollingsworth, Goldfarb/Baer, Fleishman and a prolific fellow named JOHN D'AGOSTINO. Sisters in everything *but* corporate ownership.

Issue #10 contains *Sea of Ghosts,* a tale whose theme has been swiped time and time again in the 1950's. I don't know if EC told it first, but they told it best (and most often) in comics I can't find at this exact moment. (One version is s-f and another which comes to mind is a KRIGSTEIN horror tale.) The plot should ring a bell immediately: Illegal slave traders are overtaken on the high seas by the authorities. Quickly, they dispose of the evidence by casting their enchained living cargo into the ocean. Lack of evidence prevents earthly punishment. But the victims are unable to rest in their watery graves and... You *know* the rest!

Up to now, the stories have been interesting but not particularly exciting or inspired. Things start *rolling* with **Dark Mysteries #11.** The next eleven issues of **DM** (along with **MA #13-23**) are *HIGHLY RECOMMENDED!* Don't get me wrong. There's no doubt that a lot of what makes these comics so good is their blatant imitation of EC, the best line of horror comics in the world. But the world possesses only 87 EC horror comics containing some 350 stories. Once you've read these to death (and Lord knows that's easy enough to do with all the cheap reprints out there!), these Story stories will go far towards satisfying your appetite for *more.* Not exactly the same thing... but *damn* close! Let's look at some highlights:

Issue #13's incredible *Horror of Mixed Torsos* appears in **TTTTT #3.** Nuff said. This comic also contains *Death While the Cat's Away,* which takes another look at the fertile ground for back-stabbing and murder when a lovely but unscrupulous young woman is married to a rich, but crippled old man. **Issue #16** contains a graphic cannibal/decapitation story with the not-very-subtle title *Horror of the Cannibal's Dinner.* (We almost reprinted this "classic" but we had a lot of trouble with the quality of reproduction.) **Dark Mysteries #16** is a real tour-de-force with a gruesome hanging cover and *TWO* top-notch Hollingsworth tales: *The Horror of the Walking Corpse* and *Time to Die.* Both demonstrate why some comic fans see FRAZETTA-ish overtones in A.C.'s work; both stories also make interesting use of 1950's zip-a-tone media.

The cover of **Dark Mysteries #17** is a good example of Story's obsession with walking and talking skeletons. I don't know about you but I was never impressed with skeletons—as monsters go. It always seemed to me that animated skeletons left a lot to be desired in the monster power structure when compared to super-powered vampires, inhumanly strong werewolves and magically-motivated demons. The Old Grave Digger is formally introduced in this comic, and he goes on to introduce the reader to Fleishman's tale, *Lady with the Mask of Death!,* a vampire story which shows that even Story's obsession with skeletons had limits!

Actually, the skeleton mania may have *no* limit... It's *worse* than I thought. A quick shuffle through the comics in front of

One of the earliest Story nameless horror hosts introduces her (his? *its?)* tale of terror in **Dark Mysteries #5.**

Jeff discovers his wife's problem hair... is a *BIG* problem in Fleishman's *Medusa,* from **DM #9.**

me indicates that *EVERY ISSUE* of **Dark Mysteries** from #4 through #20—the heart of the entire run—features some kind of skeleton or at least a skull in the cover art. Since very few stories in these comics have animated skeletons as important characters, we can only conclude that the editor in charge of assigning cover work had a fixation on human bones... or else had a one-track mind when it came to what he thought *sold* horror comics. The same guy must have been in charge of **Mysterious Adventures** covers since *EVERY ISSUE* from #4 through #22 of that title also features skulls and bones prominently in the cover scenes. Truly, I'm *stunned!* I've noticed that skeletons appear repeatedly on Story covers but I've *never* realized until this moment (May 13, 1992 3:00 PM EST) that this mania dominated 36 consecutive issues of both titles! Live and learn...

Speaking of skeletons, GERALD ALTMAN is added to the Story artist lineup with **issue #18's** *Terror of the Stolen Legs.* This truly gruesome tale, like not a few 1950's horror comic stories, begins in a concentration camp with a mad Nazi scientist who likes to experiment upon the prisoners. As you may be beginning to guess even now, his victims find ways to revenge themselves... from beyond the grave! Altman's mediocre but grittily moody work lends itself well to this grisly tale and his output appears in the next few issues of **Dark Mysteries.**

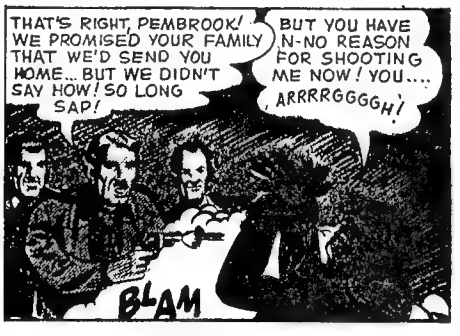
Issue #19 requires little mention here since two of its stories have appeared in **TTTTT:** *Rack of Terror!* last issue and *Snow Madness* this time around. Mad Nazi doctors and their mindlessly nefarious experiments pop up again in **issue #20's** *The Living Dead,* which Overstreet describes as a "blood drainage story." Yeah, there's that but this grim tale is also populated by the walking dead and desperate Nazi storm troopers; not a bad read for the money!

Kurt loses his head at the "hands" of a vengeful savage in *Horror of the Cannibal's Dinner,* from **Dark Mysteries #15.**

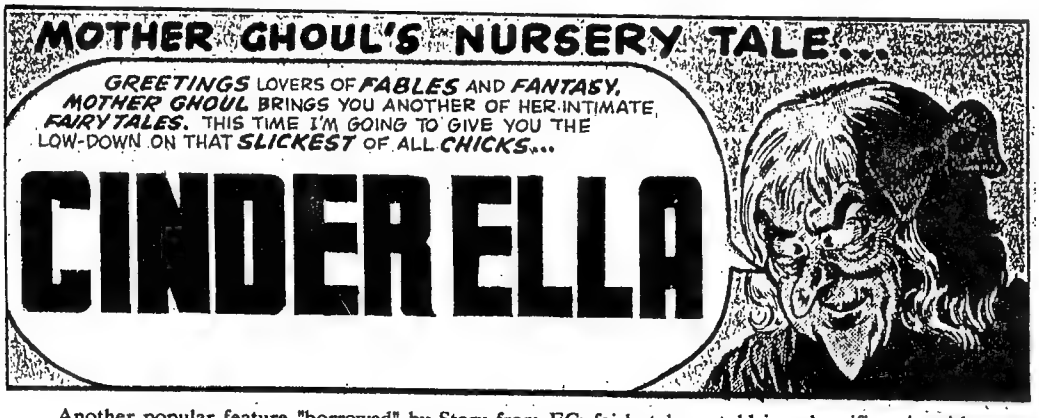
While **Dark Mysteries #22** isn't Code-approved, the title is clearly headed in that direction. No more skeletons on the cover. In fact, the obligatory helpless victim is being hassled by... ordinary black cats. It looks like they're licking him to death. As horror comics go, not much to be said for this issue nor for the subsequent pair of Code-bearing comics. *The Mother Ghoul's Nursery Tales* feature never makes an appearance in **Dark Mysteries.** I should note that these late issues are quite scarce, especially in high grade, for the reasons discussed earlier.

Fight Against Crime

The first five issues of this title aren't particularly memorable. They're typical "true crime" comics, which along with westerns and romances, are a kind of comic book which was immensely popular in the 1950's but whose time has long since passed today. The true crime publishers of this era competed on the basis of *verisimilitude:* the more "true-to-life" these dramas of guns and gangsters appeared to be, the better. Lev Gleason's **Crime Does Not Pay** was the pacesetter of the field. This type of comic book doesn't appeal to *me* very much and I'll leave these early issues alone except to point out stories by Hollingsworth in #s 3 and 4 and a nice Lou Cameron feature, *Hopped-Up Killer,* in #4. In this very *typical* 1950's tale of marijuana and mayhem, the investigating cops find a "funny-looking cigarette butt", suspect it to be marijuana and conclude from this that they have a "crazy killer" to deal with. Talk about your *Reefer Madness!*



Standard "true crime" style rubout, from an otherwise forgettable tale in **Fight Against Crime #2.** Pembrook is a kidnapping victim who apparently manages to get off a couple of sentences between when the trigger is pulled and the bullet hits!



Another popular feature "borrowed" by Story from EC: fairly tales retold in a horrific vein with undercurrents of sarcasm and humor. Remember, though Story was far from the only company imitating EC's success formula. MAD had dozens of copycats on the crowded newsstands of the '50s.

Incredibly, *SKELETONS* pop up on the covers of **Fight Against Crime #5** and **#6**, yet these are still basically straight *crime* comics. However, the logo subtitle has been changed from *Exciting Crime Cases* to *Horror and Suspense* and clearly the gradual transition to a more graphic and gruesome horror-based approach to story-telling is making its presence felt. Decent Hollingsworth and Cameron crime stories appear in **issue #5.**

The first *real* horror tale to appear in this title is the Doug Wildey epic, *Horror of the Clutching Hand,* in **Fight Against Crime #6.** The hand in question is disembodied yet still "handily" agile and it wreaks vengeance upon the criminal who debodied it in the first place. Except for a fleeting ghost appearance, the rest of the comic is standard crime fare. But the river Styx has been crossed! Overstreet lists **issue #8** as the *"last crime format issue."* This is too precise and, frankly, *wrong*—like one other piece of info Overstreet provides on the title. He lists Hollingsworth stories only in #s 3, 4, 9, 10 and 13. Well, the artist also has signed stories in issues 5, 6 and 7.* In terms of its horror-*ness,* **Fight Against Crime's** stories do continue to become more horrific with each passing issue but the change is pretty *gradual.* For example, **issue #9** has a cover box with the blurb *"A CRIME OF SUSPENSE FROM THE TOMB OF HORROR!!"* Clearly, this is an attempt to latch onto the success of EC's titles. But the title is three-quarters true crime with only the last tale, Hollingsworth's *Corpse in the Ice,* having horror overtones. This story is described as *"A CRIME FROM THE TOMB OF TERROR."* Here, Story is imitating EC's formula of having one horror story in its **Crime Suspenstories** title.

What Overstreet is probably trying to point out with the "last crime format" note is not **Fight Against Crime's** abandonment of the crime theme, but its transition to an EC-imitative approach to relating both crime and crime/horror stories. This changeover *can* be precisely delineated: it occurs with **issue #12** (March 1953) about the same time that the style change takes place in Story's other titles: **Mysterious Adventures #13** (April 1953) and **Dark Mysteries #11** (April 1953). Starting with **issue #12, Fight Against Crime's** writers swiped so heavily from EC's crime and horror titles that keeping track of all the "thefts" is a highly involved task. Overstreet notes a few. One goal in *Terrology* is to document *all* such swipery. Suffice to say that as you read any stories in the next ten issues of this title, you will continually find yourself reminded of plots you've encountered elsewhere—that is, if you're an experienced fan of 1950's comics. Fans new and old will enjoy these tales since Story swipes them very skillfully!

Fight Against Crime #13 is one wild example of what I'm talking about. The first story, *Two Heads Are Better Than One,* by the MYSTERY ARTIST is *classically* EC-ish, with long, detailed caption descriptions and a slow buildup to a violent conclusion which gainsays the benefits alluded to in the title—that is, in the case where the two heads are both *off* their respective necks! In the next story, *Deadlines,* a doctor revenges himself against an injured blackmailer by transfusing him with... *printer's ink!* SAL TRAPANI'S *Big Game Hunter* concludes with the inevitable big game trophy for one who hunts *human* game! Finally, the last story, Hollingsworth's *Bloodless Killer* (the cover story, incidentally) is the pièce de résistance. It's introduced by a horror host who, while unnamed, does welcome the reader to his *Chamber of Tortures and Terror.* The host, who looks an awful lot like the Crypt-Keeper, has a couple of comic books in front of him. The titles: **Dark Mysteries** and **Mysterious Adventures.** This is the *only* such cross-referential advertising in any Story comic reviewed here. Unusual since

*A.C. Hollingsworth is such an interesting artist that let's conjure a complete checklist of his Story horror work:

A.C. HOLLINGSWORTH STORY CHECKLIST

Dark Mysteries #7-18,20*,21*,23 (2 in #16)
Fight Against Crime #3-7,9,10,13,23
Mysterious Adventures #3-8,12

*These are the *only* unsigned ones and I'm suspicious of them. Overstreet lists them as such and while the style isn't obvious, they do have some heavy-Hollingsworth characteristics. A.C.'s work may frequently be recognized by his attractive wide-eyed women (see illo below from **MA #6.**)

Note **A.C. HOLLINGSWORTH's** trademark wide-set female *E Y E S.* This is a key "mark" in identifying stories by A.C.H.

Some people think newspaper reports have ice water in their veins. Dan here is getting a blood supply of a very different kind, in *Deadlines* from **Fight Against Crime #13.**

house advertising is a tried-and-true method of building readership and fan loyalty. *The Bloodless Killer* involves a vampire and is a *real* horror/crime hybrid.

Issue #14 is very reminiscent of **Crime Suspense:** the story titles are now short and to the point: *Death Trap, Greed* and *Murder!*—in cold, stark block letters. This formula continues in **Fight Against Crime #15** with *The Killer, Blackmail* (a story where a con artist extorts money out of naive small town girls by taking "model" photos of them) and *The Big Blast. Until Death Do Us Part* by the MYSTERY ARTIST is "inspired" by the BERNIE KRIGSTEIN EC story where a husband and wife plot each other's deaths with poisoned wine and food only to out-double-cross each other and end up *both* dead! (Okay, so you think I'm too lazy to go find the specific reference. *Naah!* Just saving it for the complete *Terrology.)*

Issue #16 is even *more* "inspired!" Remember the EC story where the bad guy gets devoured by a shark in his swimming pool? Well, in Wildey's *Death Fish,* a nogoodnik gets eaten by piranha in his bath. Also in this comic is *Foul Ball,* heavily inspired by the previously-mentioned EC tale *Foul Play.* However, Story definitely avoided imitating the EC *extremism* which got Gaines & Co. into so much trouble. The lid of extreme bad taste is still "on" for Story. With *Foul Play,* EC's editors abandoned any pretense at self-restraint in exploiting gore in telling horror stories—to their great detriment. *(Asking* for trouble is never a good idea!)

Wildey's *Trapped,* from **Fight Against Crime #17,** is a decent copy-job of *Carrion Death* from **Shock Suspenstories #9.** This is the oft-reprinted EC tale wherein a murderer has to drag the corpse of the policeman to which he is handcuffed across the desert. The last two panels of Story's story are virtually identical to those of EC. (Was EC too busy fending off the Senate committee and its minions to be pursuing its imitators in court?)

By **issue #19,** Story had taken that lid *off.* This comic is violent and bloody. The cover features a broken-bottle battle and the lead story begins with a gruesome back-stabbing. In *The Facts of Death,* a woman debates the various ways she could kill her cheating husband: her imagination graphically illustrates the methods: shooting, poisoning, stabbing, strangulation, etc. She finally ends up planting a bomb on his plane. (Remember, those were the days before terrorism and metal detectors in airports.) Needless to say, she's wrong about her husband but by the time she gets the proof, the plane—and her husband—are *long* gone in more ways than one. Fleishman's *Fat Face* is yet another version of the eternal tale about a person afflicted with a spouse who eats, eats, *eats* and... *EATS!* Jack Sprat this woman *ain't* and the last panel... well, come on, you can guess it! I'll run the panel in *Terrology* but not on this page. Take a guess and then find the answer *elsewhere* in this magazine.

Fight Against Crime #20 features the *most* gruesome cover Story ever ran. It appears in this issue's *Gallery.* EC's Bill Gaines (a casualty of high profile) ended up having to defend a decapitation scene of his own (on the front of **Crime Suspense #22**) at a Senate hearing. The lead story in this comic, *Smoked-Out,* is interesting on a number of levels. First, it appears to be quite *original.* I can't remember anything like it in EC or any other Pre-Code publisher. Ralph Marlow suspects his lovely wife of cheating on him. He follows her and does indeed find Eva meeting a handsome man in a secret rendezvous. He plots

ways to kill her but comes up with nothing foolproof—he's terrified of the electric chair. Then he finds the solution. Eva is a heavy smoker; Ralph has to go out often to buy her boxes of *Old Silvers*. The corner store owner comments on how heavily his wife smokes. *Hmm...*, thinks Ralph. Eva even smokes in bed. If her bad habit leads to an unfortunate fire... well, who could tie it to him? Accidents *do* happen, after all.

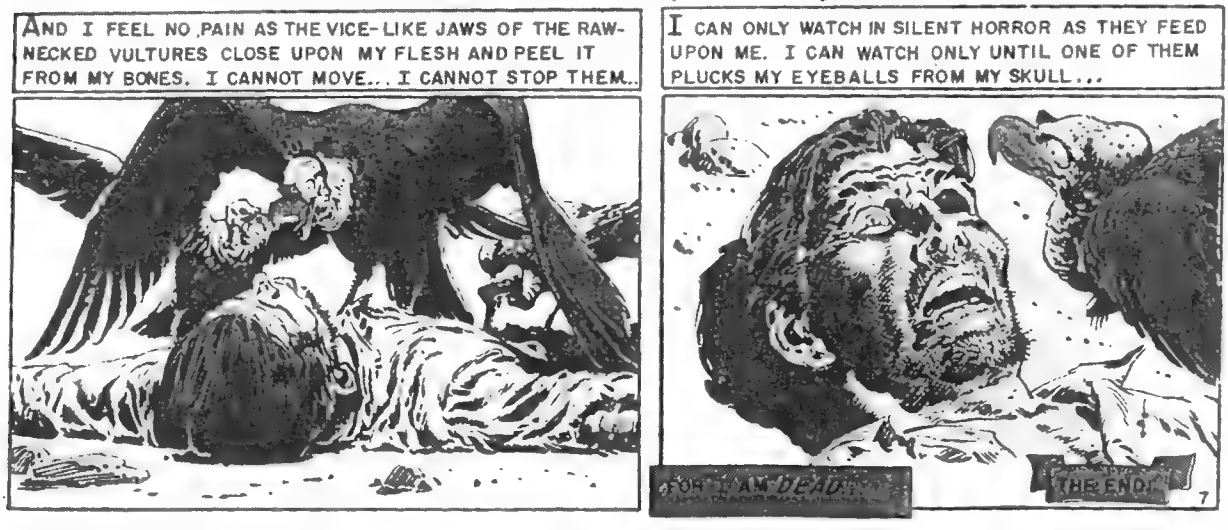
Well, I won't give the *whole* story away. Oh, all right, I *will*. Ralph *does* kill his wife but he finds out that the man she was meeting is her doctor. Apparently, she suffered from lung cancer and had only a year to live. So she was going to die anyway. He didn't need to murder her at all! On the other hand, since she wasn't cheating on him, he had no reason to kill her! What makes this story particularly interesting is the apparent link between smoking and lung cancer. Remember, this is *1953*. To even imply that a young woman could die of lung cancer as a result of cigarettes was, in the mid-50's, quite unusual. While I hardly think Story's editors were turning into militant health activists, let's at least give them credit for some prescience.

Fight Against Crime becomes **Fight Against the Guilty** with #22. There's nothing much to be said about this and the subsequent Code-approved last issue. No crime comics could survive the crushing burden of the Comics Code in 1955. Gerald Altman's *About Face*, in #22, with some interesting angle shots and wild panels, is worth a quick note. (I hate to quibble with Overstreet, but I find no evidence of a Ditko story in this comic.) A.C. Hollingsworth does make a nice farewell appearance in **issue #23.**

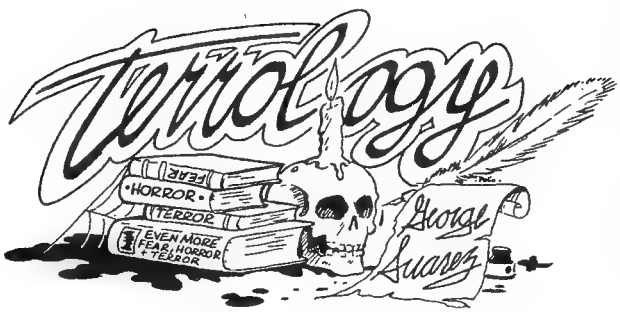
That wraps up this issue's review of Story Comics. Hope you enjoyed it. Every real fan of horror comics should have some Story stories in his or her collection. We provide you with a few here but why not pick up a real Story back issue? There's nothing like the real thing!

Next time, we talk about SUPERIOR COMICS. See ya then! And don't forget: be the first person to identify this issue's MYSTERY ARTIST and win a free six-issue sub to TTTTT!

A fine example of the art of **SWIPERY** at its finest *(worst?!)*:
Compare the above panels from Doug Wildey's *Trapped*, from Story's **Fight Against Crime #17** with those below from Reed Crandall's *Carrion Death* (EC's **Shock Suspenstories #9.**)



EC art © 1953 Tiny Tots Comics, Inc.
Renewed © 1981 William M. Gaines.



Chapter 6:
Superior

Journey into Fear #1-21 . . . . . May 51-Sep 54
Mysteries Weird & Strange #1-11 . May 53-Jan 55
Strange Mysteries #1-21 . . . . . Sep 51-Jan 55

Superior published 53 horror comics in three titles from May 1951 to January 1955.

SUPERIOR PUBLISHERS LIMITED was a Canadian comics publisher which produced three *Pre-Code Horror* comic titles intended for distribution in the United States. Superior's output of 53 *Pre-Code Horror* comics makes the company the eighth most prolific publisher: right behind Ajax and ahead of Prize. The company's first horror comic was **Journey into Fear #1,** cover-dated May 1951. Its last was **Strange Mysteries #21** with a cover labeled January 1955. The last four months of its output consisted entirely of reprints. The last original Superior horror comic was cover-dated September 1954.

The **Overstreet Price Guide** lists a fourth title, **Adventure into Fear,** with a single issue dated simply "1951." This listing has appeared in every **Overstreet** since the 2nd guide; it currently includes the query "Exist?" Well, the answer is a resounding NO! In a dozen years of collecting *Pre-Code Horror,* I've never run across this phantom comic and I know of no collector who claims to own it or to have ever seen it.

I mentioned the *non*-existence of **Adventure into Fear #1** in my original listing for Superior way back in **TTTTT #3.** Shortly after that comic appeared, an employee in one of NEC's stores called me excitedly. He informed me that he had just bought a small stock of *Pre-Code Horror* comics and told me quite smugly that it included... *"believe it or not, George..."*, a copy of **Adventure into Fear #1!** Before I could speak, he proudly informed me that he did NOT mean the Marvel title. *"It's the comic which you said doesn't exist!"* Having lots of experience with the ability of new employees to misidentify comic book titles, I patiently asked him to pull the comic out and describe it to me. *"Can't do that"*, he stated, *"I've already forwarded the stack to you through the inter-store transfer system."* It takes a day for such transfers to be completed. So the next morning, with just a little bit of curiosity, I opened the appropriate tranfer box. Right on the top of the small stack of horror comics I found a nice copy of... **Journey into Fear #1!** *Journey, Adventure...,* there are an awful lot of comic titles starting with those words. So easy to mix 'em up!

That's my theory about how **Overstreet's** listing of **Adventure into Fear #1** came about. Back in the early days of the **Comic Book Price Guide,** somebody mis-reported the title of **Journey into Fear** and the bogus entry has been carried over from one edition of **Overstreet** to the next ever since.

It's also possible that an ad appeared for a planned new title and the existence of this ad led early comic indexers to include **Adventure into Fear** as a real published title. I noted back in **TTTTT #4** that I suspect this is the case for the Ajax title **Police Thrills.** A house ad appears for this book in several Ajax titles in 1954 and the title is credited in **Overstreet** with an issue #1 dated simply 1954. (It's generally—but certainly not invariably!—a good policy to be suspicious of any comic book listed in **Overstreet** with a year but no month or quarter of publication.) However, no house ads appear in any Superior comic that I've ever handled. Another possibility is that Superior published a Canadian comic book with the title. Overstreet does not include all-Canadian comics in the **Price Guide** and perhaps this listing is the erroneous inclusion of such a creature. If any reader can cast some light on the **Adventure into Fear** conundrum, I'd be *most* grateful!

What *kind* of comics did Superior publish? Well, the company's three horror titles are by far the most interesting. Superior also issued some decent romance comics, a few humor titles and some forgettable war magazines. Superior also obtained the license to reprint some titles from American publishers in Canada. The reason for this is that in the late '40's, Canadian law banned the importation of American comic books into Canada. The reasons for this were ostensibly to protect native Canadian industry. Some also argue that Canadian authorities were particularly concerned about the gruesome content of Yankee funny books. (To this day, Canadian customs will occasionally deny entry to U.S.-produced "mature reader" and "adult" type comics.) However, Canada has also followed a policy at times of banning imports of certain American goods in retaliation for high American tariffs on Canadian staples like lumber. Whatever the reason, until well into the 1950's, the import and sale of American comic books were not allowed in Canada but Canadian companies could reprint U.S. material as long as the production work took place north of the border. The most interesting of these are the ECs. Superior distributed reprint issues of some issues of every New Trend title in the Canadian provinces. These reprints are usually of poor quality. Not only is the reproduction quality *bad* (for reasons to be discussed shortly) but the contents were cut up and rearranged in a hodgepodge manner. American ads were replaced with Canadian ones; what's worse, the enjoyable EC letter pages were dropped in order to allow room for even *more* ads.

Canadian EC reprints constitute an interesting frontier area for research among very advanced EC collectors. I don't know anyone who has done a lot of work in this area. Frankly, after completing my own EC collection, I obtained a handful of Canadian reprints and then lost interest mainly because the quality is so *poor.* The one Superior EC title I would still like to obtain is **Weird Suspenstories.** The background to this hybrid is quite interesting. In the 1950's the word "CRIME" was specifically banned from comic book titles in Canada. Accordingly, in order to reprint EC's **Crime Suspenstories** north of the border, Superior had to replace the "CRIME" portion of the logo. The

TERROLOGY

TERROLOGY is the name of an **Index/Collector's Guide to the Pre-Code Horror Comics** which will be written by me and published by NEC sometime in the next couple of years. This book will be a complete and detailed review of every horror comic published prior to the advent of the *Comics Code* in 1955. *Terrology* will be compiled via direct access to copies of every such comic and will, I hope, include hundreds of full color cover repros as well as representative interior art. This work will be intended as a "scholarly" examination of an important period in the history of the development of the comic book. While accessible by all, *Terrology* will be specifically targeted toward the serious collector/fan of *Pre-Code Horror.* In the meantime, while **TTTTT** comes out quarterly, *Terrology* will appear as the title of a column in which I will attempt to provide the comic reader with some basic background info about the fascinating world of 1950's **Pre-Code Horror Comics.**

way they did this was to cut it out and replace it with a "WEIRD" from an issue of **Weird Science.** This is the only example I know of a Superior reprint of an EC with a new title. Overstreet notes that **Crime Suspenstories #1-3** were reprinted by Superior as **Weird Suspenstories #1-3.** If these three comics do exist, they are extremely rare since I've never encountered them in 18 years of collecting EC's. For more information on Canadian EC reprints, see the article by J.B. Clifford in the front of the **Overstreet Price Guide.**

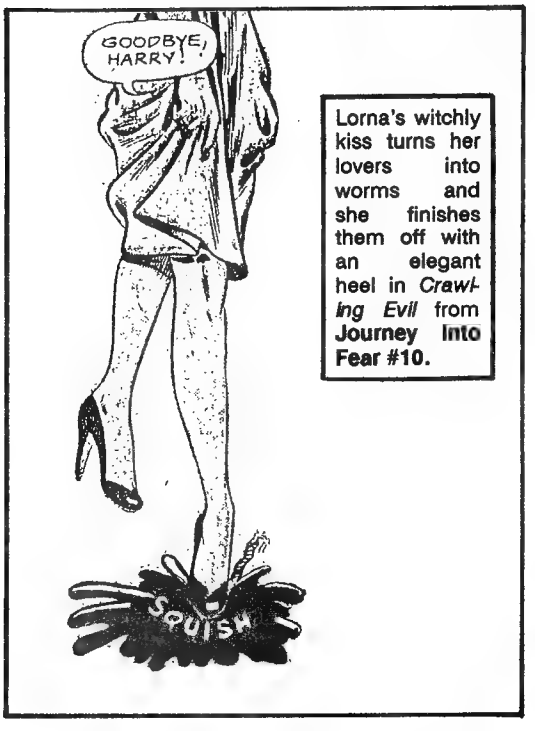
Why were Superior reprints of such lousy quality? Well, aside from mediocre editorial decisions about selection of contents, the printing quality was bad because the comics were printed from duplicate asbestos plates made from the original American printing plates. While I'm not familiar with the actual mechanics of the process, apparently the duplicate plates were simply unable to make as solid an impression upon the paper. Most of these reprints show incomplete ink impressions with lots of near-blank and semi-blank areas on pages.

Unfortunately, this problem is not limited to Superior's EC reprints. Even Superior's *own* horror comics, like those we're about to discuss, suffer from this problem—although the problem is much worse with the EC reprints. As best as I can figure, Superior had a corporate policy of skimping on the quality of its comic books. They used cheaper printing plates in general and probably did not re-ink the plates as often as American publishers did while producing the press run. With large press runs, plates sometimes have to be made over as they wear out. I suspect Superior simply did not replace the plates as quickly as they could have. (To anyone who doubts that "even" American comic publishers will frequently cut corners *wherever* they can, I simply have to point out the "Marvel chipping" problem plaguing most Silver Age Marvel comics.)

Superior also used slightly inferior paper as compared to American publishers. This means that their comic books are much harder to find in *high* grade. Many copies are browning, brittling and chipping along the edges. This is especially true with back covers. Anyone who collects Superior titles can relate to the following: When you thumb through a Superior comic from the back, you'll almost always note that the back cover seems to be noticeably wider than the interior pages—it seems to overlap the inner pages—*much* more than on an American comic. This makes it a lot easier for the back cover edge to start chipping from ordinary handling—especially as the comic book ages and loses its suppleness. This phenomenon is more noticeable with back covers because most people thumb casually through a comic book by flipping the pages from back to front. If you don't believe me, pick up a comic book for browsing purposes and notice how your natural tendency is to "shuffle" the pages starting from the back cover.

To make a long story short, Superior comics are harder to find in nice shape. This leads us to the obvious truth that high grade copies should be at premium value. Less obviously, I would suggest that copies with *higher quality reproduction* should also sell at a premium. I know that when I shop for Superior comics, I'll always examine the quality of the interior printing. I've bypassed really nice high-grade copies of certain horror comics from this company simply because the story pages were quite poor. In fact, my current want list for Superior horror titles is limited only to issues for which I need copies with better-printed interiors. Note that this problem has somewhat limited my selection of sample panels for this *Terrology*. It's hard enough to reproduce color comic book pages in black-and-white; it's nearly impossible when the color originals are not deep and sharp!

Okay, enough with minutiae! What about Superior's stories? Well, they're pretty damn *good!* I may be starting to sound like a broken record in this respect. Chalk it up to the fact that *Terrology* has begun with coverage of the publishers which I enjoy the most. Rest assured we'll get to the *less* appetizing comic producers sooner than we want to. Most Superior stories are drawn by the Iger Studio, which also produced a lot of work for Ajax-Farrell. Some notable artists who did work for Superior (perhaps through Iger) include Matt Baker and (perhaps) Jack



Lorna's witchly kiss turns her lovers into worms and she finishes them off with an elegant heel in *Crawling Evil* from **Journey Into Fear #10.**

Ellen wants a "real man" so she throws her hubbie into a vat of "solvent" and teases him mercilessly—from *Revenge can be FATAL!* **(Strange Mysteries #10.)**

Kamen. However, for the most part, Superior's artwork is standard Iger Shop: and that ain't bad! The company relied a lot upon *Good Girl* art—almost every cover features a beautiful woman being terrorized by one of a large stable of monsters, demons, witches and other supernatural creatures. Superior excelled at "leg art" and made special use of the technique of allowing female legs to spill beyond panel margins into neighboring panels and border areas!

Superior's cover format is *very* standard. Almost without fail, each cover features a cover scene depicting one or two people (always one being a woman) menaced by an evil creature. Inserted onto the cover is a box containing the titles of the four stories contained within. This formula is almost never broken. (See the *Cover Gallery* for the rare exceptions.) These title boxes are always accurate. Readers may want to compare this with similar boxes on Story horror comics which are almost invariably wrong!

Superior did *cheat* on occasion: more than one cover was taken from the splash page of an interior story. And in several cases, splash panels were derived from a shocking panel from the related story. These kind of shortcuts seem typical for a company which did seem to take more of a assembly-line approach to producing comic books than most publishers.

While the above discussion may lead readers to feel that Superior's horror titles are very formulaic and pre-packaged, the truth of the matter is that this is really limited to this "packaging." The stories themselves are very wild and subjects are drawn from an astonishing array of horror themes. While it's obvious that Superior directed their output to youngsters, the topics are extremely varied and adult themes are alluded to frequently. **Journey into Fear #11's** *Terror in the Night* implies that street walkers (complete with fishnet stockings and street lamps!) are being preyed upon by a mad artist. This kind of titilation appeared often in Superior horror comics and no doubt appealed to the adolescent males from which the publisher drew most of its audience!

In **TTTTT #5,** we discussed Story's *Pre-Code* output. Superior horror stories are of quite a different character. As I remarked last issue, Story's tales are composed with horror derived from everyday life: particularly from the horrible world of murder and other crime. Superior tends more toward supernatural themes. Every issue of **Journey into Fear** and its sister titles abounds with ghosts, haunted castles, vampires, demons and other supernatural monsters.

One thing I have to give Superior (or more properly, the Iger Studio) is the originality of their scripts. While they aren't always the most profound stories in the world, the plots are usually quite novel and their unfolding is quite hard to anticipate. In this respect, Superior stories are frequently much more unpredictable than, for example, those of EC. EC stories may be much better written and they pay a great deal more attention to character description and motivation, but the outcome of many Superior stories are often quite unforeseeable: sometimes almost random in their evolution. While the bad guy usually does get punished at the end of a Superior tale, this rule is violated frequently enough to make it quite interesting. What's really intriguing is that often the good guys get "punished" also—and the reader can rarely tell in advance if the helpless "victims" are going to survive any of the very sinister activities in which they

A girl can't walk the streets without being harassed by maniacs.—**Journey Into Fear #11.**

An extreme example of how the Iger Studio would violate panel borders in the interest of pulchritudinous display. This 'un from **Strange Mysteries #18.**

find themselves immersed. Many a Superior story ends with the death of *everybody!* Justice usually triumphs but often there's nobody around to enjoy the just results!

Frankly, in this respect, they are much better stories than those of publishers like Comic Media and Gilmor, which tend just to be gory, with no attention paid to logical plot advancement and the careful development of a real surprise ending. As much as I like most of Atlas' enormous output, I must admit it's true that Atlas frequently suffers from the same problem. Lots of Atlas yarns, just like Comic Media, Gilmor and other *Pre-Code Horror* publishers, can hardly be classified really as "stories"—many are simply the product of diluting a trivial literary device or plot "notion" with four or five pages of text and art. In contrast, virtually every Superior "yarn" meets the basic requirements of the "short story" genre.

While I've been able to assign to a flagship title to every *Pre-Code Horror* publisher so far, Superior is somewhat of a problem. The company's two primary titles **Journey into Fear** and **Strange Mysteries,** both ran for 21 issues. **JIF** started four months earlier but SM lasted four months longer. However, the last three issues of SM (as well as **Mysteries Weird & Strange,** which as a shorter-lived title, does not merit consideration as flagship) are all reprints from earlier issues of **JIF** and **SM.** Accordingly, I feel entitled to assign flagship status to **Journey into Fear.**

Journey into Fear

Superior's head office was in Toronto, Ontario. However, the company did maintain some kind of editorial presence in New York, since the company solicited "real ghost stories" from readers, asking them to send such yarns to *"Dr. Shade's Ghost Clinic"*. This solicitation appeared in Superior's first comics: **Journey into Fear #1-4.** The invitation was never printed in the other titles. Furthermore, Superior either didn't receive any interesting responses or decided to drop the reader-participation program since the *Ghost Clinic* was later replaced with standard text pieces and no letters from readers ever appeared in any Superior horror comic. Thus ended Superior's attempt to interact with its large readership. This indicates that after the first four issues of **Journey into Fear,** the company's approach to composing horror comics settled down into a format which remained very much the same for the rest of the company's history. After **Journey into Fear** was cancelled in September 1954, the first three issues of the title were recycled, covers and all, as reprint material for the remaining two titles, whose last three installments, running into January 1955, were composed entirely of such reprints.

The first two stories in **JIF #1** are by Matt Baker, one of the all-time great *Good Girl* artists. Overstreet indicates that these are reprints; I'd be curious to know from where since both are real horror stories. The cover of **JIF #2** features one of the murky ghosts (usually either murky green or murky blue) which materialize regularly in Superior horror stories. These ghosts are really a pain since they never reproduce well when we photograph them! The ghosts in the lead story in this **TTTTT** are readily identifiable because this story was shot from original art!

JIF #6 contains a particularly nice story, *Partners in Blood,* with a vampiric theme. Professor Martin and his niece Rose decide to visit a supposedly haunted castle along the Rhine: Vampir Schloss is its name and the locals go out of their way to warn the couple about the castle's dangerous reputation. Of course, they ignore them! The story moves along at a fast pace: female vampire bites Rose, Martin kills vampire, Rose kills Martin now that she's a vampire, Rose goes off with the hunchback Tor, who has captured her now undead heart. However, in a desperate attempt to punish the bad guys, the writer concluded the story by having Tor fall off the castle ramparts while carrying Rose over their medieval "threshold"! Whatta ending! Superior stories typically have the bad guys getting it in

A fine panel by the under-recognized master Matt Baker from **Journey into Fear #1.** The murdering ghost is typically Superior: a murky pale-colored spectre which is darn hard to reproduce in black-and-white. Fiction House used similar spooks in its **Ghost Comics.** Whatta *coincidence:* a lot of those stories were also done by the Iger Studios!

the end. But usually the punishment is meted out a bit more adeptly than this.

In **JIF #8,** a scientist invents a potion which "breaks down human tissue", enabling human beings to enter new worlds—specifically, the world of fiction! Yes, human beings can enter the world of... books! His worst enemy swaps books on him sending the scientist and his girl friend into the world of Tracula, a vampire who does very bad things to people, *"especially G-GIRLS!"*

JIF #10 contains *Crawling Evil,* a story about a misanthropic witch whose malignant kiss turns men into worms. (Wow! *Flashback!* I remember running this description and the panel shown here in a comic catalog I put out back in high school and ended up returning money to dozens of people who ordered this comic book!)

Journey into Fear #12 contains a story, *Evil Intruder,* which shows just how far off the deep end Superior horror comics will go on occasion. The "star" of this story is a Trugg, a hideous ape-like monster from a race which normally inhabits the inaccessible Kulgak Mountains, practicing their "obscene" rites, such as making blood sacrifices with the "Blade of Sodorm." One particular Kulgak, through some unexplained means, finds himself on Earth in search of love... specifically, the love of a human female. He casts a "mystic spell" upon Lucy, which makes her believe him to be her doctor husband, who the monster has already slain. The story gets even sicker from here! The monster misbehaves atrociously while wooing his "beloved" (see panels) and she uncovers his disguise. In a rage, Kulgak kills her, but his brother monsters have tracked him down and he is returned to the inhospitable Kulgak Mountains, forever pining for the love he can never have. I don't even want to start trying to assess all the psychotic underpinnings of this unsavory story!

Journey into Fear #18, contains a tale, *The Devil's Store,* where the bad guy does get away with murder. Of course, the bad guy here is Satan himself who opens up a little joke shop. Only thing is all the joke items he sells backfire on their purchasers: exploding cigars really explode (ugh!); itching powder causes a fatal car crash; and the trick box he sells to a magician who needs to saw a woman in half in his act... well, it doesn't work quite right: the woman really ends up cut in half! The cops finally come calling at the Devil's Store only to find the "merchant" leaving in a cloud of dust, with only a cloven hoofprint left behind. This story is unusual by Superior standards in that evil completely escapes punishment.

Strange Mysteries

This title needed a few issues to warm up. While the stories in the first three installments are "OK", there's nothing to recommend in particular. **SM #4** does contain a notable tale, *The Rat Men of Paris,* wherein a race of rat-men, living in the sewers with their despotic queen, plot to take over the human world. While the Rat Men are foiled "this time", the story ends with a frequently used *Pre-Code Horror* device: a foiled but not vanquished Rat Man addresses the reader directly, warning him that *"...the day of the rats will come! You'll see—"* Oooh! I'm scared!

In **SM #5's** *Blood of the Zombie,* a walk-in customer makes a very strange request of an undertaker ("I wish to be embalmed, please! Immediately!") *Eyes of Evil* provides some very nice *Good Girl* art, including exceptional examples of panel border violation.

The next two issues of **Strange Mysteries** contain stories reprinted in earlier issues of **TTTTT.** (See back issues for details. Hey, we can't offer you everything in one *Terrology*!) **SM #8** has a gruesome vignette entitled *Flaming Horror* about a grossly obese man who is unable to find work because of his size and contemplates suicide. To add insult to injury, he is grossly mutilated in a fire while smoking in bed. It gets worse! He inherits a mansion from his dead cousin and falls in love with a spinster ghost who, doomed to haunt the old house, finds him the best fish in a very small pond. However, the only way they can find true happiness is for him also to be... well, dead. I'll leave the rest to your imagination.

The gore-fan in me always seeks to find the most gruesome panel ever to appear in a *Pre-Code* publisher's output. That

The vilest dialogue to appear in any Superior horror comic. The Trugg expresses his love for the bewitched Lucy in this panel from *Evil Intruder,* in **Journey into Fear #12.**

panel for Superior is the splash from *You Can't Cheat A Ghost*, which appears in **Strange Mysteries #9.** The black-and-white reproduction on the next page doesn't do the scene true justice. When Terrology is finally published, I expect it will contain a section chronicling such "extremes", perhaps cross-ranked by publisher, with the Ultimate Gore Award proferred to the worst of the bunch!

If **Strange Mysteries #9** contains Superior's most extreme panel, then **SM #10** contains one of the wackiest stories! In *Revenge Can be FATAL!*, Dr. Zart is pushed into a vat of "solvent" by his unfaithful wife and her lover, George. He survives the treatment but is hideously disfigured. Insult is added to extreme injury when Dr. Zart discovers that George has killed his wife and run off with Zart's money. Nonetheless, with her dying breath, Mrs. Zart tells the unhappy doctor that she would rather have had her throat slit by her duplicitous lover than continue to live with him! Zart is so driven by revenge now that he doesn't allow the accidental death of his rival to stop him. Zart brings George back to life in order to kill him again with his bare hands! (Wacko, wacko, *wacko!)* But George isn't a professional back-biter for nothin': he turns the tables on Zart and stabs him to death while rising from the operating table. At this point, it doesn't matter *who* wins since both guys left are no good!

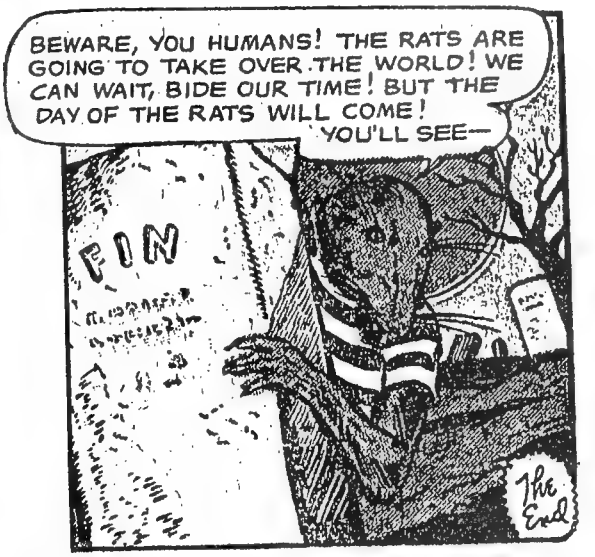
Strange Mysteries #11 contains an intriguing story, *One Second to Live*, wherein the entire story is a reminiscence of a criminal taking place during the one second between when the trap door is sprung and his neck is broken on the gallows. This story is very well-done; its approach is quite mature and reflective. The criminal relives the events of his life. We discover that as a child, he observed his mother being murdered by a mysterious assailant. His mother's ghost compels him to find the killer but gives him very cryptic clues. Ultimately, he discovers the murderer to have been his own father! The criminal takes revenge upon his father and then pays the supreme price for his actions! *Nifty* stuff!

The issues described above are the best of the run for **Strange Mysteries.** While **issues #12-18** aren't bad, they contain little worthy of particular mention: the usual Superior mix of ghosts, monsters, haunted houses, beautiful (but harried) dames, unscrupulous criminals and hapless victims. The title effectively dies in September 1954. The last three issues consist entirely of reprints from earlier issues of the same title and **Journey into Fear. Strange Mysteries #19** reprints **Journey into Fear #1** with the cover derived from the splash page to the story *"I am Murder..."*. **Strange Mysteries #20** reprints **SM #1** with the cover a mockup from the cover of **Journey into Fear #2. Strange Mysteries #21** reprints **JIF #7** with the cover a blowup of the splash page to the story *The Werewolf Lurks.* In terms of reproduction, these reprint issues are of especially poor quality: I've never been able to find copies with even moderately decent printing. The plates involved had already been used for complete print runs and during these dying days of *Pre-Code Horror,* Superior felt itself under no obligation to care about quality control!

Mysteries Weird & Strange

Apparently, Superior's *Pre-Code Horror* output was successful enough for the company to introduce a *third* horror title. Exactly what that title actually IS remains a subject for debate. Allow me to explain. The covers all bear the logo **MYSTERIES** with "WEIRD and STRANGE" featured in very prominent but somewhat smaller type just below. The indicia of all 11 issues of the title refer only to "MYSTERIES." Overstreet recognizes the duality of the name by listing it as **MYSTERIES (... Weird and Strange.)** The full name is what it's generally referred to by collectors. As I've noted in previous *Terrology's,* virtually every *Pre-Code Horror* title had extra cover "blurbs" and "mini-logos" to ensure that no doubt was left in the reader's mind as to the content of the comic. For example, all issues of **Journey into Fear** also carry the cover blurbs "WEIRD" and "STRANGE AND UNBELIEVABLE!" **Strange Mysteries** covers also say "HORROR" and "TERRIFYING! STARTLING! SUSPENSE!" But in the case of **Mysteries...** the "blurbs" are much bigger and instead of being located on the cover edges, they appear in enormously italicized letters directly below the main logo. Suffice to say that most fans would be led to include the extra words as part of the comic's title. Since **Mysteries** all by itself strikes me as a singularly inadequate name, I'll always refer to

Rose gets the bite put on her by the Vampir Schloss in *Partners in Blood* **(Journey into Fear #6.)**



1950's comic readers lost a lot of sleep after reading dire threats like this one—from **Strange Mysteries #4's** aptly titled story, *The Rat Men of Paris.* (Note the stereotypic striped shirt. This particular French rat seems to have lost the *beret* which his compatriots wore throughout the story!)

this comic formally by what I consider to be its "full name", complete with both adjectives.

The first issue of **Mysteries Weird & Strange** has a May 1953 cover date—the newborn horror comic began its run at the very height of the *Pre-Code Horror* craze. I'd like to be able to say that Superior offered a new approach to horror story-telling with the new title... but that wouldn't be *true.* **Mysteries** is a true sibling of its longer-running sisters. And that isn't bad! As you'll see, **Mysteries Weird & Strange** contained its share of interesting horror fare!

The **first issue** includes a weird story about a witch/werewolf hybrid, appropriately entitled *WITCH WOLF TERROR.* In **issue #2,** *REVENGE in SMALL FORM* is a good example of a typically boring Superior story title fronting a rather interesting story about a beautiful "gold-digger" who finds herself at the mercy of voodoo spells cast over the dolls which she loves to collect. The spells are cast by one of the men, we are told, she *"flings aside like useless dolls."* The splash to this story contains one of Superior's few bondage scenes. Superior's artists almost never indulge in this mild fetishism; although this story does exhibit their penchant for lingerie and bare leg art!

Mysteries Weird & Strange #5 contains a weird story, *Horror A La Mode,* by an artist I recognize but can't place just this moment. Big Jim McCoy is a criminal who suffers from horrible nightmares wherein he visits a sinister nightclub all of whose employees are monstrous! In one panel, the maitre 'd slyly inquires if he would like the company of some of their 'D' girls. *"'B' girls?"*, Big Jim responds. *"No! D—D for Death!"* It's almost needless to say that his nightmares finally drive him to the authorities who solve his sleeping problem by strapping Big Jim into the electric chair. **Issue #7** offers one of Superior's wildest splash pages in the lead story, *DEMON in DISGUISE.* The monster known as the Masher, leers over the giant spoon he's holding which contains a helpless female.

Issue #8 (July 1954) is the last "original" installment of **Mysteries Weird & Strange.** In *The Devil's Birthmark,* George Powers must track down a beautiful woman who was born with the black star on her forehead which marks her as the reincarnation of the ancient witch Sybil, who's over four hundred years old!

At this point, **MW&S** becomes an all-reprint title for its final three issues. **Mysteries #9** reprints **Journey into Fear #2,** with a really bad cover created by butchering the splash panel from *A Debt to the Devil!* (**JiF #2**'s cover had already been assigned to the reprint comic **Strange Mysteries #20!**) **Mysteries #10** reprints **Strange Mysteries #2** with the rather mediocre cover derived from the story *The Haunted Hand!* **Mysteries #11** reprints **Journey into Fear #3,** with the cover taken from the splash page of *Midnight Prowler.* Note that unlike Gilmor and Comic Media, Superior made no attempt to "hide" any of its reprints by rearranging the artwork or story order, or by changing the title and/or recoloring the artwork.

So ends our look at **SUPERIOR.** What's in the future? Well, I did sit down recently and made a tentative (read: very tentative) game plan for the next few issues of **Tales Too Terrible To Tell.** Here's a (VERY TENTATIVE) list of upcoming Terrology subjects:

TTTTT #7: Harvey
TTTTT #8: Standard
TTTTT #9: Ace
TTTTT #10: Gilmor
TTTTT #11: Charlton & Fawcett

Current plans are to assign Atlas two installments, or else, run a very, very large *Terrology* feature in the Atlas issue. All other publishers will be covered in *single* installments with the small to very small publishers being handled in batches—as with the pairing of Charlton & Fawcett above. Wherever possible, these matches will be made under the auspices of some kind of logic (for example, Charlton bought out Fawcett's horror titles in 1953.) But *please!* Don't hold me to any of this as plans may change as research continues.

Gruesome graphics from **Strange Mysteries #9.**

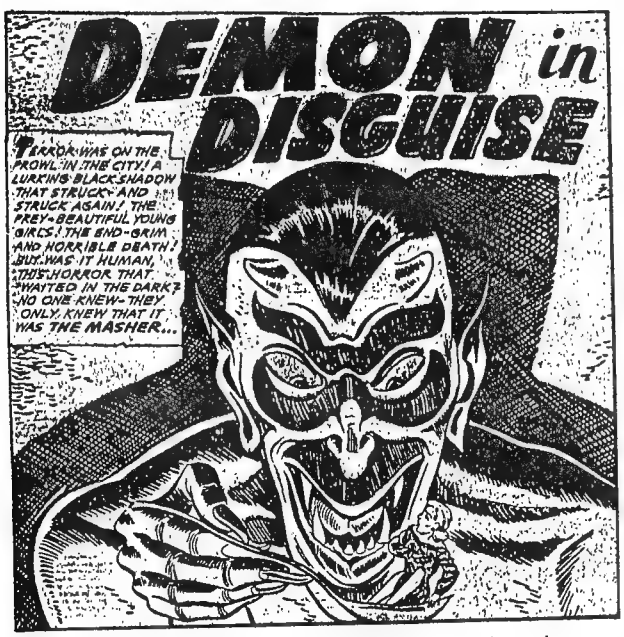
ERRATA & TRIVIA

Lacking in perfection is a defect I share with all of humanity. Accordingly, **ERRATA & TRIVIA** is a new feature in which I will offer corrections and amplifications of information provided in earlier *Terrology.* Herewith some examples:

(1) In last issue's *Terrology* feature on Story Comics, I noted that Story printed its two horror titles in Canada for seven straight issues early in their runs, but they did not do this with their horror/crime title, **Fight Against Crime,** during this same period. I

hypothesized that Canadian authorities might have had a greater problem with allowing American crime comics than American horror comics to be printed in Canada. Well, NEC Press' production manager Bill Devine has reminded me that Canada had enacted a specific ban on the appearance of the word "CRIME" on the cover of a comic book—whether American or Canadian. Presumably, this would make it difficult even to print a CRIME comic north of the border—whether or not intended for distribution in Canada. On a separate but related issue, Bill also noted that the American Comics Code did not specifically ban the word CRIME from comic covers—it simply required that the word not appear larger than any other words in the title. The Code did and does ban the words TERROR, HORROR and WEIRD, thus effectively cancelling EC's most popular titles.

This would explain how titles like Lev Gleason's **Crime Does Not Pay** and **Crime and Punishment** survived for a few Code-approved issues. It does NOT explain why Story's **Fight Against Crime** was transformed into **Fight Against the Guilty**, other than to judge that Story's editors must have inferred that the writing was on the wall for "crime" comics regardless of the technical language of the Code. Bear in mind that what killed many *Pre-Code Horror* publishers was the reluctance of comic distributors and newsstands vendors to carry any titles offered by *notorious* comics publishers like EC. EC's Bill Gaines has been quoted as saying that it was this informal boycott which led to the quick demise of his Code-approved non-horror non-crime *New Direction* titles after an average of five issues each.



Great splash page originally appearing in **Mysteries (Weird & Strange) #7.**

(2) **Hand of Fate #26**, included as the last issue of this Ace title back in **TTTTT #2**, does *NOT* appear to exist. The comic is listed in **Overstreet** as having a March 1955 cover date, with its contents including a Howard Nostrand story, no less. However, Gerber does not include it in his **Photo Guide**, and at least one collector with greater experience than myself assures me that the comic does NOT exist. Actually, another good rule for determining the existence of obscure comics listed in Overstreet: a *Pre-Code Horror* comic with a 1955 cover date is a very *rare* bird! (Although they *DO* exist: **Tales from the Crypt #46** is dated Feb-Mar 1955.)

Here is a *corrected* publisher summary for Ace:

Ace

Baffling Mysteries #5-24 . . . . . Nov 51-Jan 55
#25 & 26 Code-approved.
The Beyond #1-30 . . . . . Nov 50-Jan 55
Challenge of the Unknown #6 . . . . . Sep 50
Hand of Fate #8-25(11/54), 25(12/54)
. . . . . Dec 51-Dec 54
Web of Mystery #1-27 . . . . . Feb 51-Nov 54
#28 & 29 Code-approved.

Ace published 97 horror comics in 5 titles from September 1950 to January 1955.

With a new count of 97 comics, Ace still retains its position in third place among *Pre-Code Horror* publishers. However, now its lead over Harvey is down to a single comic: 97-96.

—George Suarez

Sybil, the 400-year old witch, fences with the witch-hunter in *The Devil's Birthmark*, from **Mysteries W&S #8.**

Chapter 7:
Standard

Adventures into Darkness #5-14 . . Aug 52-Jun 54
Out of the Shadows #5-14 . . . . . Jul 52-Aug 54
The Unseen #5-15 . . . . . Jun 52-Jul 54

Standard published 31 horror comics in 3 titles from June 1952 to August 1954.

STANDARD COMICS published three horror comics and a pair of very short-lived science fiction titles: all this production came during the real heyday of *Pre-Code Horror*—the period running from mid-1952 through late 1954. Most significant horror comic publishers began their output in 1950 or 1951: Standard was one of the very *last* to get on the bandwagon. The "average" publisher produced about 52 horror comics during this time; this makes Standard a little "sub-standard" in terms of quantity, at least.

Pre-Code Horror publishers come in two forms: those which evolved from a *Golden Age* comics publisher, and those which came into being in the '50s, the result of dramatic market changes which hit the comics industry during this time: the transformation of the reader's interest from super-hero to more esoteric genres like crime, western, romance, humor, fantasy and, of course... horror. Standard falls in the first category. The company started in the early 1940's as **NEDOR**—the publisher best-known for its only really famous super-hero, the **Black Terror.** Most fans consider the Black Terror a second-rate crime-fighter, but he certainly had a following in his day: his adventures were related for nine years in the flagship anthology **Exciting Comics,** and his own title ran for 27 issues from 1943 through 1949, in the middle of the "death years" of the super-hero era. He also showed up in another anthology—**America's Best**—for eight years of its run.

However by 1950, the Black Terror had seen his day and, along with a host of other colorful super-heroes, was consigned to the wastebin of history. Nedor changed its name to Standard Comics and introduced a lineup of genre comics whose titles should sound familiar to readers of *Terrology:* **This Is War!, Crime Files, Western Hearts** and, of course... the horror titles discussed here. The three horror comics were introduced between June and October 1952. And all, interesting enough, begin with the issue #5. Why such *odd* numbering? Standard was apparently concerned that with the glut of comics hitting the newsstands at the height of the *Pre-Code* "explosion", new titles would be short-shrifted by newsstand vendors. Remember, this world of comic retailing and readership was dramatically different from today's. In those days, #1 issues were frequently printed *without* a number on the cover so distributors, vendors and fans would *NOT* know that the title was new. It seems logical to think that even the "naive" comic fans of the '40s and '50s would be intrigued by a new comic title. The problem publishers were concerned about must have laid with the vendors and their distributors. With the newsstands cluttered so badly that rack space was at a great premium, the general attitude seemed to be that if any title was going to be denied space, it should be a new, unproven comic book: i.e. a #1 issue. Under the frequently-quoted (and frequently incorrect, or at least, shortsighted) dictum "don't mess with success", these "astute" businessmen reasoned that since sales were booming and the titles currently out were producing those sales, why replace them with callow comics produced by a publisher newly entered into the fields currently firing the market? No doubt, this attitude could also be affected by monopolistic pressure from the established publishers and their existing distribution networks.

Logic dictates that this numbering gimmick would be less effective with the distributors, who would have to be aware enough of their business relationships to know that Standard was a new horror publisher, and that their titles, however numbered, were new to the market. The Standard strategy was probably directed more at the newsstand vendors, who would be faced with the weekly task of stripping the racks of unsold comics in order to find space for new incoming titles. Your average 1950's corner drug store owner was no comic book expert and clearing the rack of deadwood was probably not high on his list of favorite tasks. One of the simple formulas he may have used would be to favor titles with what he presumed to be an established readership and a good rule of thumb to determine this would be the issue numbers, which could easily be found on the covers of most comics. A title which had reached as high as #5 would probably have found a solid following of loyal readers.

Analyzing Standard's numbering logic doesn't mean that I *endorse* it. In fact, the strategy probably failed since Standard remained always a small factor in *Pre-Code Horror* publishing and died with the earliest wave of collapse in mid-1954. The *Comics Code* was promulgated on October 26, 1954 and went into effect January 1, 1955. Since comics are dated at least two months in advance, most titles (that *survived)* weren't directly affected by the new Code until their March 1955 issues. However, the horror and crime hysteria struck the comics world early in 1954 and Standard was one of the first publishers to collapse under pressure of popular opinion. Furthermore, no Standard non-funny title survived into a *Code-approved* format.

Trying to out-think comic distributors and newsstand vendors must have been a difficult and thankless task. Other publishers used the strategy of leaving issue numbers completely off their covers: for example, Ajax-Farrell, Ace and Prize's **Black Magic** title. It's significant, I think, that no publisher went out of their way to *highlight* this information: one would think that if vendors really favored longer-lived titles, comics like **Blue Bolt Weird Tales** and **Marvel Tales** (with issue #s in the hundreds, due to continuing the numbering run of *Golden Age* titles) would dominate the market and that titles reaching double-digits would have boxed their issue numbers in huge type prominently next to the werewolf or vampire on the cover. And

TERROLOGY

TERROLOGY is the name of an **Index/Collector's Guide to the Pre-Code Horror Comics** which will be written and published by NEC Press sometime in the next couple of years. This book will be a complete and detailed review of every horror comic published prior to the advent of the *Comics Code* in 1955. *Terrology* will be compiled via direct access to copies of every such comic and will, we hope, include hundreds of full color cover repros as well as representative interior art. This work will be intended as a "scholarly" examination of an important period in the history of the development of the comic book. While accessible by all, *Terrology* will be specifically targeted toward the serious collector/fan of *Pre-Code Horror.* In the meantime, while **TTTTT** comes out periodically, *Terrology* will appear as the title of a column in which I will attempt to provide the comic reader with some basic background info about the fascinating world of 1950's **Pre-Code Horror Comics.**

surely, some foolish publisher would have gone overboard (as publishers have occasionally been known to do) and started numbering titles in the thousands, or even *millions!* (For example: **Stories of Abject Terror #3,429,336!)**

While numbers have had a magical significance in human culture since ancient times, this effect has not been noticed in comic-collecting circles until the modern era. As a young collector, I can remember being stunned to acquire copies of **Action Comics #100** and **Detective Comics #100** and noting that not only did these issues lack any any special contents (I imagined: *"Special Anniversary 100th Issue with Brand-New Origin of Superman"* or something similarly intriguing), but the achievement of reaching centennial issues was not even mentioned on the cover or anywhere inside! The same went for comics like **Adventure #200, Action #200** and **Detective #200,** all magazines which I lusted after in my youth. And there is certainly some significance in the fact that even a powerhouse publisher like DC left issue #s off the first couple issues of new titles like **Justice League** and **Green Lantern** during the birth of the *Silver Age,* while the first issue of the newborn **Flash** proudly states #105, continuing from a well-established (yet long since defunct) *Golden Age* title. The influence of ignorant and uninterested newsstand vendors seems to have been felt here in some form.

Such digressions are one of my favorite parts of *Terrology*. I hope you share the feeling. But let's get back to our subject: Standard Comics. Standard published three sister horror titles and they are so similar that one could almost describe them as triplets. **The Unseen #5** came first, in July 1952, followed closely in subsequent months by the first issues of **Out of the Shadows** and **Adventures into Darkness.** Standard titles varied between quarterly and bimonthly schedules. This is somewhat unusual in the world of *Pre-Code Horror:* the "standard" formula for most other publishers was bimonthly or monthly, sometimes switching back and forth between the two frequencies in response to the effects of demand and supply as the era unfolded. One imagines that with a quarterly schedule, fan interest and loyalty had the opportunity to wane during the intervening weeks, particularly when exciting horror fare from comic mills like Atlas and others were inundating the corner racks. During the boom year 1953, Standard was publishing about one (sometimes two) horror comics a month while Atlas was churning out over a dozen as part of a huge tidal wave of material flooding the nation's newsstands.

Standard Science Fiction

Fantastic Worlds #5-7 . . . . . Sep 52-Jan 53
Lost Worlds #5-6 . . . . . Oct 52-Dec 52

Standard also published two very short-lived science fiction titles, **Fantastic Worlds** and **Lost Worlds.** Originally I included these in Standard's lineup of *Pre-Code Horror* comics on the premise that the contents of many supposed fantasy comics (like Gilmor's **Weird Tales of the Future** and Atlas's **Journey into Unknown Worlds**) were actually horrific. Upon closer perusal, however, I can state with authority that such was *NOT* the case with Standard. While these comics aspire to no more than the usual comic book "space opera" formula for science fiction (complete with astronauts talking in space and rockets revving their engines like drag racers before taking off), the stories involved really cannot be classified as horror, except for one or two trivial exceptions. I will review these titles at the end just for the sake of completeness and because I have the space. They are interesting in many ways and one issue does contain *(Heaven Be Praised!)* a Rudy Palais story which no one seems to have known about. (Boy, that Rudy does get around...) **Fantastic Worlds** and **Lost Worlds** suffered the great tragedy of death in the flower of youth: Standard learned the lesson which virtually every *Pre-Code* publisher came to experience: "science fiction in comics does not sell." An axiom which remains true today, I think.

What were Standard *Pre-Code Horror* comics like? Well, if in previous *Terrology* columns, I can be accused of waxing poetically about quality, now I may be brought back down to Earth. Standard isn't an uninteresting publisher of *Pre-Code Horror.* Certainly, the stories and artwork lack the mind-numbing puerility and mediocrity of a publisher like ACG (one whose review in this column will have to await a **Tales Too Terrible** in the #50's, at least). Standard's stuff was... well, *standard.* What can you say about a company which chose a sparkling, exciting company name like... Standard? The bottom of every splash page shows the Standard banner-style logo with the following guarantee shown at the bottom of this page. Clearly, this was the "standard" parental disclaimer prominently placed on page one on the premise that the average mother or father wouldn't browse any further even if they did bother to check out what junior was reading these days. Actually, parents didn't have *too much* to worry about with this company. Most of its output was fairly tame. Standard ran some intriguing covers, as you'll see in this issue's *Gallery* and back cover, but nothing to knock your socks off. While the inside stories abound with monsters, maniacs and malevolent forces, the tales are handled with a restraint not as evident in publishers like Superior, Ajax-Farrell and yes, *God love 'em,* EC. Overstreet mentions a couple of cannibalism panels and *(NO!)* a lingerie panel, but other than those titillatory references, nothing to make a Price Guide browser stop and take notice.

Standard used a crew of journeymen artists, many of whom also worked for other *Pre-Code Horror* grist mills like Story, Comic Media and Gilmor. I don't see evidence that either the Iger or Powell studios ever produced work for this publisher. The only artists of significance were ALEX TOTH who has a number of interesting stories and REED CRANDALL, an even better craftsman, who drew two stories in **Out of the Shadows #9,** one of which we're reproducing in this **TTTTT.** *The Corpse That Came To Dinner* is easily the best horror story to appear from Standard. It isn't often that I can make this statement so absolutely about any publisher. Read it and I think you'll agree. Ruben-Moreira, Gene Fawcette, Mike Sekowsky, Jack Katz and George Tuska all drew stories for Standard, a few of which were signed. Katz usually signs his stories and his work is interesting: he has a distinctive style with overtones of Bob Powell. None of the rest are really worth commenting about. Even Tuska, an artist whose work I enjoy, isn't very impressive here and I have to think he had assistance from a lesser talent. I'll mention some of these artists in reviewing titles issue-by-issue but don't expect to collect Standard *Pre-Code Horror* because of the artwork. While rarely atrocious and *(excepting* Crandall) never supreme, it's usually just adequate.

The standard Standard promotional blurb which appears at the bottom of the splash page of almost every first story.

Unlike some competitors, Standard Comics never interacted in any way with the company's readers. No letter column ever appeared and I can't recall any feature where the editors speak directly to the readership. In fact, I know of only one story where the characters talk directly to the reader in the last panel. (This "*You May Be Next!*" technique is used on occasion by many *Pre-Code* publishers as, in their minds at least, a particularly scary device.) No house ad appears in any Standard horror comic: the only way one can tell that these comics are related is by the Standard banner featured on the cover and on the bottom of the first page. This failure to relate to the readers coupled with the lack of house ads indicates a mix of bad strategy on the part of Standard's editorial staff and this may explain why Standard's line of comics came to a rather *early* demise.

Standard's output was more short-lived than most publishers; as a result, the quality level is maintained steadily throughout the runs. Styles, story mixes, cover design, etc. are all extremely consistent right from the first issues through the last. For example, *every* issue features a cover box with the title of what some editor considered the feature story for that installment. Covers *never* have anything to do with either the feature story or anything else appearing in the same comic. Standard was one of the biggest offenders (among many!) in failing to relate cover art to interior contents.

However, overall, Standard's covers are probably the best part of the company's line of horror comics. Some of my very favorite *Pre-Code Horror* covers come from this company. Particularly nice ones, all of which are included in this issue's *Gallery* (or—unabashed self-interested plug: have been run in previous issues of TTTTT—all available through the back issue ad on the inside back cover) **Adventures into Darkness #13 & 14, Out of the Shadows #8 & 11** and **The Unseen #7, 13 & 15.** That's a greater percentage of "better" covers than can be found with many other *Pre-Code Horror* publishers. Thematically, the most *common* Standard cover device is the animated skeleton. Other monsters appear regularly, especially werewolves (a favorite topic for Standard writers). **The Unseen #15**'s cover is a well-done version of a frequently-used *Pre-Code Horror* cover scene: the man in the barber's chair who is just beginning to notice that the guy holding the razor has a rather unhealthy appearance!

STANDARD PRE-CODE HORROR SCHEDULE

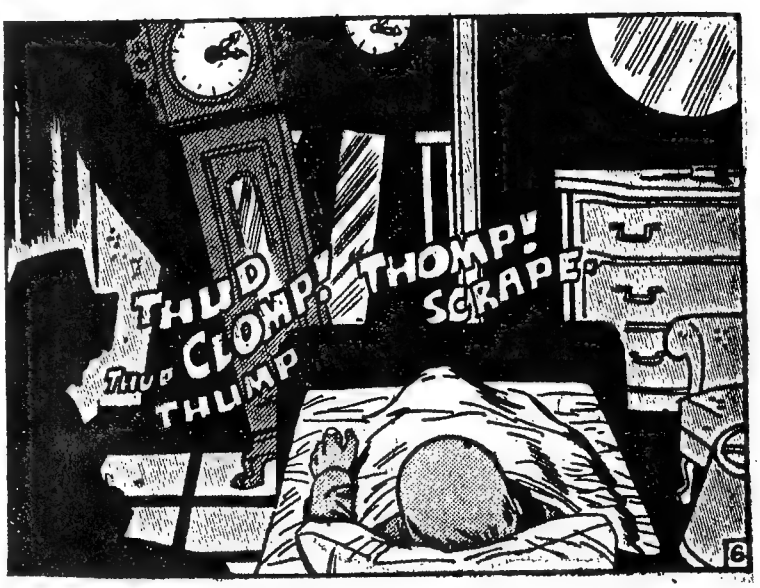
*Indicates bimonthly schedule per indicia. Otherwise, quarterly.

Jun 52	Uns #5				
Jul 52		OoS #5			
Aug 52			AiD #5		
Sep 52	Uns #6			FW #5	
Oct 52		OoS #6	AiD #6*		LW #5
Nov 52	Uns #7*			FW #6*	
Dec 52			AiD #7*		LW #6*
Jan 53	Uns #8*	OoS #7		FW #7*	
Feb 53			AiD #8*		
Mar 53	Uns #9*				
Apr 53		OoS #8	AiD #9*		
May 53	Uns #10				
Jun 53			AiD #10*		
Jul 53		OoS #9			
Aug 53	Uns #11				
Sep 53			AiD #11*		
Oct 53		OoS #10			
Nov 53	Uns #12				
Dec 53			AiD #12		
Jan 54		OoS #11			
Feb 54	Uns #13				
Mar 54		OoS #12*	AiD #13		
Apr 54	Uns #14*				
May 54		OoS #13*			
Jun 54			AiD #14		
Jul 54	Uns #15				
Aug 54		OoS #14			

At the usual risk of drowning the reader in obscura, allow me a few comments about this timetable. First, note that not a single month is missed. Standard published like clockwork. Second, **Adventures into Darkness** was most often published bimonthly: the heart of the run, #6-11, emerged every two months. That's 6 out of the 10 issues. Of course, this is just what the indicia says. Actually, **AiD #11** is labeled a bimonthly issue but it came out three months after issue #10. **The Unseen** ran bimonthly only for #7-9 and the anomalous #14. Around the same time as this odd **Unseen, Out of the Shadows** went bimonthly for only two numbers: 12 & 13. Apparently, **OoS** was the house quarterly as its frequency for most of its run was every three months. For at least one stretch of time (Feb thru June 1953) FIVE issues of the sisters appeared with just one issue of that title. This lack of frequency does explain why Standard's horror output concluded with **Out of the Shadows.**

Standard employed single and double-page *fillers* with some regularity: as usual, these aren't all that interesting. Nobody can tell a remotely interesting horror story in one page and the "factual" fillers tend to be on the depressingly boring side.

Time to review Standard title by title. There's no question about a flagship for this publisher. While its three titles are "triplet" in nature, the first-born and longest-lived "sibling" is **The Unseen.** This title got a one-month jump on its sisters, and as a result, lasted one more issue: the others ran from #5 to #14 while **The Unseen** lasted for one more number through #15. However, in terms of indicia dates, this is NOT the *last* Standard horror comic. **The Unseen #15** is dated July 1954 while **Out of the Shadows #14** bears the date August 1954. Okay, this doesn't *quite* make sense. So let's quickly construct a little time chart for the three Standard titles and see exactly how they moved between quarterly and bimonthly frequencies.



The terror of the *thump-scraping* clocks!—from **The Unseen #7.**

The Unseen

Unseen #5 opens the Standard *Pre-Code Horror* era with an Alex Toth tale, *The Blood Money of Galloping Chad Burgess.* Chad Burgess is a highwayman whose 200-year old spirit continues to protect his cursed gold from those who covet such earthly wealth. Dr. Paul Furness stumbles into the path of Chad Burgess and the lust for tainted treasure afflicts his wife Diane with such a fever that she develops superhuman strength and threatens even the life of her husband! The story ends when ghostly king's men materialize to capture the long-dead highwayman and close the books on the filthy lucre!

Dr. Death is a three-page story in **Unseen #6** in which a man is injured in an auto accident and treated by a physician who it turns out..., well, let's just say that after leaving the doctor's house, he encounters a group of mourners who have just returned from the medical man's funeral! Standard made more use of this kind of filler story than other publishers. A number of Standard comics contain such short padding material: running from one to four pages. For the most part, they're not too good; this length simply does not allow for effective development of a story—even by the knee-high standards maintained by *Pre-Code Horror* publishers.

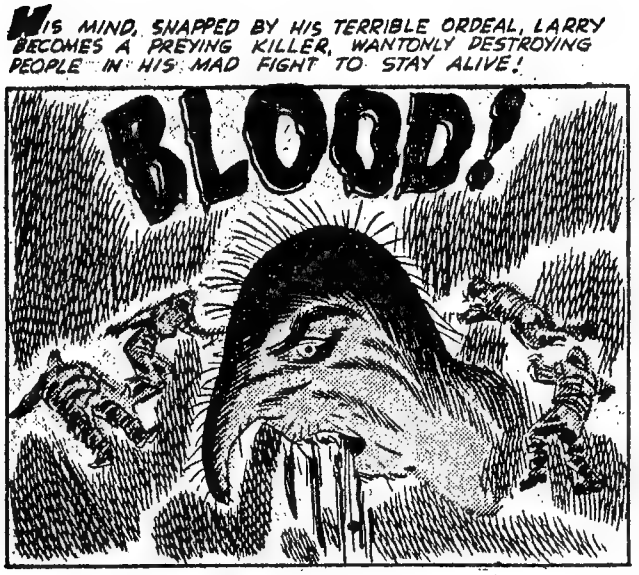
In yet another story named *Till Death Do Us Part*—this one in **The Unseen #9**—a twin torments his brother by abusing *himself.*

Unseen #7 contains a really wacky story with the title *Time is the Killer.* J. Bottomly Debbs owns a successful clock shop and is a real tightwad. He hides his money inside the cases of grandfather clocks in his store. His cleaning woman, Mrs. Smithers and her son break in during the night to find the dough; Bottomly shoots them both and hides the corpses inside two such clocks. Telltale red blood drips from the bottom of the machines, but the unobservant police don't catch such "subtle" clues. (Note: dripping red blood is about as extreme as Standard ever gets. But they use this device a lot: even moreso than more generally gruesome publishers like Story and Ajax-Farrell.) Well, as you might be starting to guess, Smithers & Son aren't quite dead and somehow they manage to toss old man Debbs down the stairs, precipitating a stroke and leaving him a paraplegic in bed attended by a nurse who soon falls asleep on the job. While Debbs stares in paralyzed terror, the two mobile "clock coffins" mount the stairs and enter the bedroom to... finish the job! Time's up for Debbs: the bell tolled for him! The panel where the mother and son grandfather clocks thump and clomp their way into Debbs's presence is a true classic (in the sense of *BAD,* I hasten to add) of *Pre-Code Horror!*

A familiar lycanthropic refrain—from **The Unseen #9.**

The Unseen #9 is a particularly solid example of the *best* of Standard horror. *Your Grave is Ready* is a nicely done story about a Wyoming werewolf who acquires his wolfly appearance simply by being reared by wolves after surviving a plane crash. The doctor who treated him as a child suspects the young man, John Curtis, no doubt because of his pointy ears and, as we are repeatedly told, "wolf-like" appearance. While this particular werewolf isn't generated by the traditional formula, his death is: via silver bullet. JACK KATZ offers *The Rat Man,* a title which along with such staples as *My Brother's Keeper, Death Wish* and *Till Death Do Us Part,* have to qualify as the most common titles to appear in *Pre-Code Horror* comics. Here, the title character, an exterminator, uses his control over rodents to kill a rich woman who has hired him to fumigate her home—a home infested by the exterminator himself! Of course, the rats, their appetite honed to ultimate sharpness with the taste of human blood, turn on their master for a quick dessert! Hey, speaking of *Till Death Do Us Part,* that's the title of the next tale in this landmark comic, and—surprise of all surprises—it's about Siamese twins! The most typical story about such twins involves keeping the reader in the dark about their status until the "shocking" last panel. In this story, the twins are known to be Siamese from the beginning; in fact, they undergo a successful operation to separate them. The "twist" here is that each twin suffers sympathetic pain when the other is hurt. However, these twins also suffer from low brainpower, since the evil twin doesn't deduce from this situation that feeding his unconscious brother to a lion (due to a conflict over a woman) will result in some pretty horrendous and ultimately fatal injury to himself.

Unseen #9 also introduces an **EERIE PUZZLES** page which appears intermittently as filler material in all three horror titles. Such juvenile features is a good indication of the age group to which comic publishers in the 1950's directed their product. It's all the more jarring to contemporary readers when you consider the "mature reader" nature of the stories surrounding this kiddie page. A sample page appears elsewhere in this **TTTTT.**



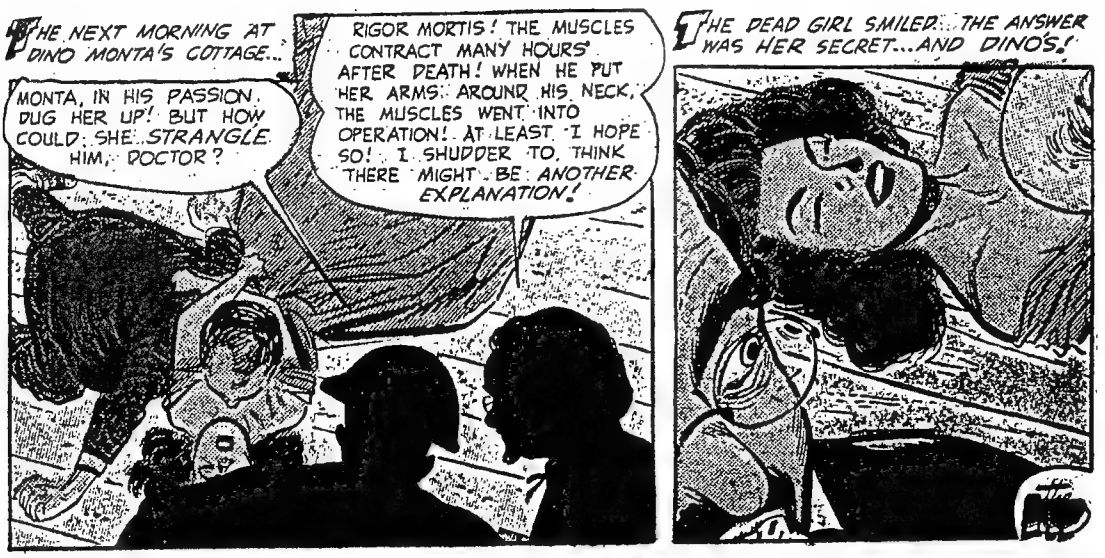
The Thing from the Dark, a cold-blooded mole monster, lusts for blood in **The Unseen #12.**

The Wolf Dancer in **The Unseen #11** is another example of Standard's devotion to werewolf stories: in this one, a werewolf manages to supplement his income by performing a wolf-dance in night clubs! This story is by a decent artist named ARTIE SAAF, whose name I don't remember seeing in any other horror comics. Does he ring a bell to any readers?

Standard's continuing mania for red blood as a story element is evident in *The Thing from the Dark* in **issue #12** of **The Unseen.** A jilted lover goes underground (literally—into a cave) and after "the months pass" he assumes a bestial appearance and becomes a man-sized mole. Since, we are told, his blood has turned cold, the mole monster becomes obsessed with consuming hot human blood. This story is a good example of Standard at its worst level: it contains almost no plot worthy of note, gets its science completely wrong (moles *aren't* cold-blooded!) and the artwork is hack work: in fact, it looks quite familiar: the same artist may have banged out a few stories for Gilmor. Standard and Gilmor seemed to have employed some of the same poorly paid pencil pushers during this heyday when, it appears, anybody with at least one hand and one eye could attempt to make a living drawing comics.

Unseen #15, the last issue of the title, contains *Date With A Corpse,* yet another version of the man-kissed-to-death story. Dino Monta is a Sicilian grave-digger in love with the beautiful Maria Villardi who, needless to say, dislikes "everything" about him. Thrashed by her brother, he leaves with a sharp threat: *"As for you, Maria, who refuses my kisses... some day I will kiss you and you will not be able to stop me."* (emphasis is Standard's). Maria gasps: *"What does he mean, Pietro?"* Not only is Maria none too sharp, but she seems to have forgotten Dino's occupation. If victims in horror stories and movies had IQ's in greater than double-digit strength, most of the plots would end about half-way through with the villain jailed well in advance of the climax of his sinister activities. Also, this bad guy, like most criminals in fiction, is not only fatally obsessed but also extremely learned in a very narrow field—we are informed that he has "an amazing knowledge of poisons." Are you getting the necrophiliac point here? Dino kills Maria by poisoning her wine with strychnine and none of the village citizens can figure out how she died. Maria's brother asks the doctor how it could be that there is no cure for such illness and he answer: *"It's a disease I've never experienced or treated. I am baffled!"* Apparently in this part of Italy, grave-digging requires more education than medicine. The reader, however, being a naturally astute horror fan, already knows what's going to happen now. Dino digs up his diva and invites her to his little bachelor cottage for an evening of wining and dining. Her arms are tight, her body is hard and her lips are cold (the comic writer's telling you this—*not* me) but she hugs Dino with a bear's grip: until he strangles in her arms. In the concluding panels, that the doctor does finally come up with an explanation for this particular death: rigor mortis. Wrong *again,* Doc!

Stories like *Date With A Corpse* lend credence to the cries of would-be censors that comic books in the 1950's had truly deteriorated to the point where "no subject is left untouched." While the approach used here isn't particularly graphic and the art is



Grave-digger Monta will spend eternity in the cold arms of the woman he loves—but not *quite* the way he planned—in *Date With A Corpse* from **The Unseen #15.**

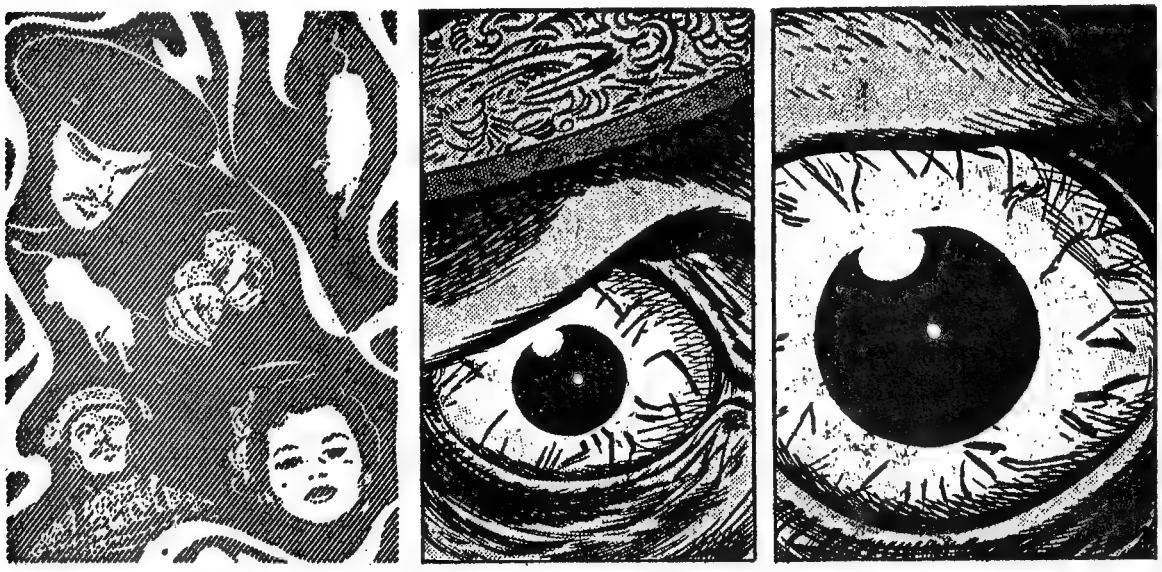
Silas Madden is the victim of a homicidal mop in **Adventures Into Darkness #8.**

so mediocre that the visual shock value is greatly depreciated, the plot itself is quite perverse. Such stories have a campy value today, particularly with the onslaught of PG-13 and R-rated books and movies assaulting our culture in the last couple of decades. But, frankly, I'm not sure I'd want my own eight-year old to read this kind of material. Would *you?*

Adventures into Darkness

Standard's second-born *Pre-Code Horror* title also starts with issue **#5.** The most interesting story here is *Day of Reckoning!,* in which the prototypical *rich-woman-married-to-gigolo-who-only-wants-her-money,* Rosalinde Gordon, is a famous red-headed singer who, we are told, sings so ethereally that she's called the "Bird Girl." While arguing with her duplicitous husband, she's badly burned in a stovetop fire. The *standard* Standard doctor enters the story here and explains to Larry that *"your wife will be terribly disfigured for life."* The disfigurement though is rather unusual: Rosalinde has literally turned into a Bird-Girl: her face is orange and has a distinctively parakeet-ish appearance. Furthermore, Rosalinde now has the ability to control birds. The most interesting part of the tale follows: Rosalinde employs her new-found skills to take revenge upon her unfaithful husband, who along with his paramour, are driven off a cliff by a flock of angry avians. Rosalinde ends up transformed completely into a bird—only the red crest on her head remaining as a reminder of her human origin. Rosalinde reminds me of the "mole man" from **The Unseen #12** and both are good indicators of the level of science to be found in Standard fare: apparently in this universe, it's sufficient for a person to resemble or to behave like some kind of animal in order for mysterious forces to turn the hapless individual into some strange hybrid form of said animal. *Gee,* this kind of causality is a very useful tool for unimaginative comic writers!

AiD #6 is a particularly noteworthy Standard product with nice stories by both JACK KATZ and GEORGE TUSKA. The Tuska tale, *Corpse Convention,* is not only very well-drawn, but an extremely good horror story. Newlyweds Sam and Grace Allison arrive in New York without hotel reservations on Friday the 13th. After being turned away by an even *dozen* places of lodging, they end up at a very strange inn. The weird-looking clerk at the front desk (his skin's ghastly white!) informs the couple that the only thing available is "Room 1313 *on the 13th floor*" (as if the reader couldn't figure *that* out!) Sam isn't very bright but neither is he superstitious. Preferring to spend his wedding night in a creepy hotel to a park bench, he follows the pallid bell-hop into an elevator and doesn't seem perturbed by the fact that there is no 13th floor on the indicator. Arriving on what the bellhop simply refers to as "the floor between the 12th and 14th", they are confronted with a lunatic who invites them to join the "Suicide Club" which holds its annual meeting that night. The bellhop dismisses the incident as a joke by a partygoer who's had a few too many. At this point, Grace is truly terrorized. The cracked mirror, hat on the bed and open umbrella indoors tips her off that something might be amiss here. Sam's not concerned however: he'll just get the maid to clean up. (Remember what I said about the IQ level of horror story victims?) While he's gone, Grace is kidnapped by the Suicide Club. Apparently, the hotel had been owned by a foolish businessman who flaunted superstition by correctly numbering *"the floor between 12th and 14th."* He was rewarded for this hubris by financial disaster. Depressed beyond all measure by his failure, the hotel owner, joined by a group of other "generic" depressed men, conducted a farewell party in Room 1313 which



An interesting set of panels showing the hallucinatory experiences of a despotic Spanish general—from Alex Toth's *The Hands of Don José,* in **AiD #9.**

culminated in the celebrants jumping out the window! (Unfortunately for the reader, all of this unusual activity is depicted in text only.) Meanwhile, Sam reaches the lobby and everything's "normal." The desk clerk, whose skin now looks much healthier, has no memory of the lodgers in Room 1313: in fact, he denies that the hotel even has a 13th floor! It turns out that the suicidal events of the past take place on a ghost floor—one which reappears every Friday the 13th so that the Suicide Club can have its anniversary party and enlist new members. Finally enlightened, Sam manages to save his wife and, of course, salvage his honeymoon.

Adventures into Darkness #6 also contains a signed story by RALPH MAYO, *The Thing from the Sea,* which proves that he is not THE MYSTERY ARTIST of Story Comics, whose identity has been the object of a little contest for the last two issues of TTTTT. A couple of entrants suggested that Mayo is the artist under investigation. A good guess, but, unfortunately, not a winning one. The identity of THE MYSTERY ARTIST is disclosed at the end of this *Terrology*.

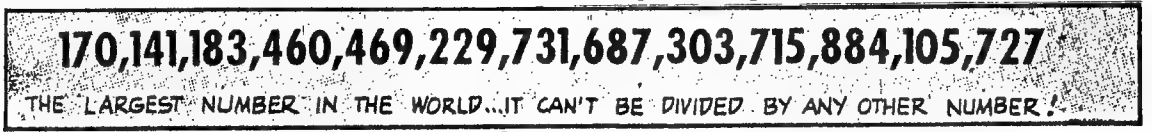
The Fatal Strand in **AiD #8** is about Silas Madden, a janitor who takes great pride in how well he mops floors. (Remember: most horror comic villains have some kind of obsession. It's a necessary ingredient to push them over the homicidal brink.) In this case, Silas gets reprimanded by the landlady for complaining when rent-paying tenants walk on his nice shiny floors. Silas takes revenge by strangling her with her own long brown hair and, in a poetic twist for a lunatic, cuts off "the fatal strands" before disposing of her corpse in the omnipresent *"makeshift grave."* Silas attaches the landlady's locks to the handle of a mop and goes back to work cleaning his precious floors. How Silas intends to answer the inquiries of the authorities, who will inevitably be brought in to investigate this mysterious and sudden disappearance is never made clear, nor is it even relevant. Silas' insanity is reaching full fruition now and after seeing the face of the landlady in the water on the floor, he meets his maker by "accidentally" strangling himself in the strands of his new self-made mop. Poetic justice, eh?

The clever valet discovers the gourmet secret of his eccentric master's eating club—in **AiD #13's** *Feast of the Ghouls.*

One of the best ALEX TOTH efforts to appear in Standard horror, *The Hands of Don José* can be found in **Adventures into Darkness #9.** This tale, rather long by this company's standards (8 pages) tells us about the Spanish dictator General Martinez, who is jealous that his lady love, Isabella, is enamored of the famous bullfighter, Don José. Perhaps Senorita Isabella doesn't appreciate the General's sense of humor. And can we question her *taste?* For example, would you consider it an example of a healthy sense of humor to have a bullfighter's hands removed and send them to the woman you weally want to woo? The dictator then arranges for a fake bullfight where picadors torment the disarmed Don José, who is also unable to speak since his *tongue* was removed as well. The General's advisor warns that he's *"playing with fire—and fate."* And so he *is.* The aforementioned fate intervenes and without explanation Martinez suddenly finds himself in the middle of an arena which is completely empty—except for a pair of very vicious-looking bulls. Only Don José is in the stands and he now is able to respond to the General's entreaties: *"How can I help, General? I have no hands!"* After the interesting set of psychedelic panels reproduced here, the General is found dead in his bed: apparently *"gored to death—by a bull!"*

Standard breaks another horror comic taboo in *Feast of the Ghouls* in the penultimate **Adventures into Darkness, issue #13.** Dennis Meadows is a London gourmet who has tasted every food in the world. He's sick of everything! It isn't until he discovers a particularly new and exotic delicacy before his interest in life is restored. Discovering a Gourmet Club in New York whose members share his interest in fine foods, he dismisses his valet who is suspicious of Meadows' strange comings and goings and the fact that corpses keep showing up in the neighborhoods frequented by his master, always looking as if *"some wild animal had torn it apart."* Get the message yet? Meadows hires a new valet in New York and in this lies his undoing since this savvy American, possessed apparently of a true triple-digit IQ, figures out that his new boss has strange tastes in food. Appearing uninvited to the Gourmet Club, the Yankee valet confronts the members, who in consistent Standard science, have been transformed into monstrous creatures as a side-effect of their addiction to cannibalism. The monsters, including Meadows, manage to escape but their doom is preordained, we are told, since their secret is out. Meadows doesn't even live to be jurisdictionally punished for his crimes; his partners in cannibalism are hungry and, of course, they call on the newest member to provide sustenance while on the lam! This cannibalism story, like the necrophilia tale related earlier, is about as extreme as Standard ever gets. Note that the "extremism" involves plot only: cannibalism is never actually depicted and the artwork is so mediocre that visually, the story doesn't really offend—to the extent that horror stories typically offend sensibilities, at least.

AiD #13 also contains one of the few interesting filler pages to be found in Standard horror comics. *Let's Go MAD* is the name of this feature, which never appears again, in which conundrums of mathematics are presented for reader entertainment. For example, consider the fascinating fact found elsewhere on this page. It's good to be informed as to the nature of the "largest number" so that we can know the theoretical limits for human population, Michael Jackson's wealth, the uncontrolled growth of super-hero team comics, etc.

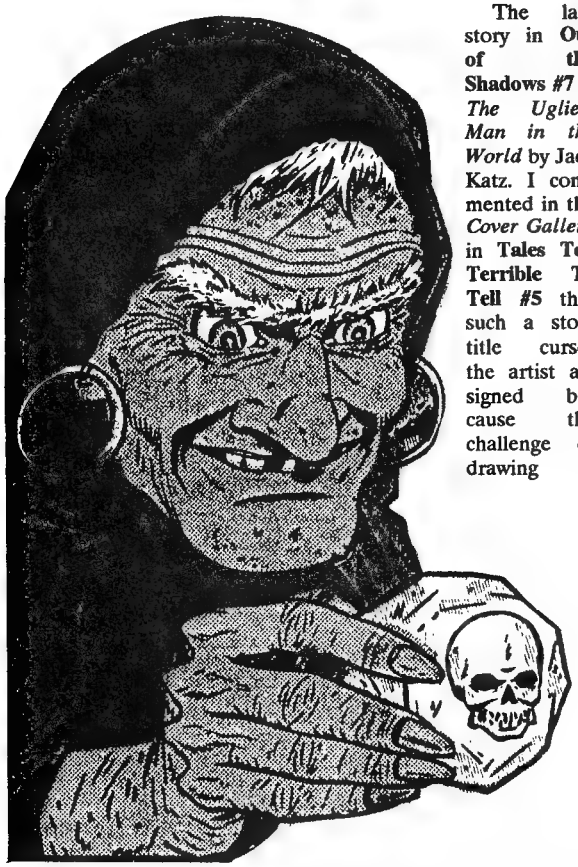


Who says comics aren't *educational?* Comic readers of the 1950's were introduced to such fascinating facts in pages like *LET'S GO MAD,* from **Adventures into Darkness #13.**

Adventures into Darkness dies with its 14th issue: a comic book completely unworthy of note except for a really nice cover showing a shipwreck victim adrift while a lifeboat full of—what else?—aninmated corpses approach, offering salvation of a very dubious sort.

Out of the Shadows

The first issue of **OoS** (numbered #5, as you know by now, like all Standard comics), contains George Tuska's best effort for the company, *Deadly Diamond*. "Best" in terms of artwork, at least. The story itself, about a gypsy curse afflicting a valuable gem, isn't especially noteworthy. (Gypsy curses seem to appear frequently in Standard plots.) The splash, a rare full-pager, is the real jewel here: one of the best to be found in Standard's stuff.



The last story in **Out of the Shadows #7** is *The Ugliest Man in the World* by Jack Katz. I commented in the *Cover Gallery* in **Tales Too Terrible To Tell #5** that such a story title curses the artist assigned because the challenge of drawing someone who can even remotely qualify as the ugliest man in the world is probably far too high for any average *Pre-Code Horror* artist to meet. I noted this in the context of Toby's **Tales of Horror #1,** which has a "censored" box over the face on the cover, highlighting the feature story of the same title as this Standard offering. Katz is a decent artist but he isn't good enough to rise to *this* challenge. The tale itself is easily told. Ron Carney is a successful actor known as the "King of Horror" for Zenith Films. But the president of the company informs the King that his crown has fallen: apparently, his star is in the decline after horror classics like *The Secret of the Tomb* and *The Mad Grave-Digger*. Carney walks through the park dreaming of conceiving a face of "truly surpassing horror." He encounters a member of The Sect of the Ugly Ones, who are able to provide him with a truly great horrific visage, by virtue of a special "press." Ron returns to the studio and brags that *"My life's ambition is achieved. I've got the ugliest face in the world!"* He becomes an immediate hit with his latest movie. Up to this point, the reader is pretty clear on the fact that the transformation is permanent—and the sect-members seem to share this thought: *"Now you are one of us!"*, they plainly gloat. Carney, having the standard Standard room temperature IQ, tries to "remove" his hideous mask, only to find that... what he sees is what he got! Carney returns to the Sect's underground headquarters only to find nothing but a stone wall emblazoned with a hideous face not unlike his own. The story's not *that* bad... how horrible the face I'll leave you to judge!

The purported "world's ugliest man" gets flack from his director, from **Out of the Shadows #7.**

Out of the Shadows #9 is the single *BEST* Standard horror comic. How can I say this so absolutely? Well, it contains *TWO* Reed Crandall stories and they're both excellent. *The Corpse That Came To Dinner* is reproduced in its entirety in this TTTTT. The other Crandall classic, *Hanged By The Neck*, is about a magician, El Rondo, who is ripping mad at having a handsome young conjurer named Leonardo introduced into his act. Leonardo is also sweet on El Rondo's pretty assistant, Carla. El Rondo is a nasty sort and he plots a "perfect" crime. Feigning friendly acceptance of the new circumstances, he instructs Leonardo in the art of fake hanging. With lots of practice, Leo catches on but—*horror of all horrors*—something goes wrong on the stage and the young enchanter is strangled to death! El Rondo's "act" is perfect: neither the authorities nor the innocent (and dumb) Carla suspect anything. Carla even comforts her mournful (and grossly overacting) boss: *"It's your nerves, Rondo! The shock of the accident was too much!"* Soon, however, the malevolent magician need pretend no longer: he starts to see the shadow of Leonardo's hanging corpse everywhere. Hallucinations drive El Rondo into fits of hysteria, but ever the dedicated performer, he forces himself to go on the stage. In fact, he will perform exactly the same hanging stunt which led to Leonardo's death. (Okay, *okay,* we're dealing with another room temperature IQ here, I must concede.) I'm so sure you can guess the "stunning" climax, that I won't even bother to describe it.... other than to tell you that Leonardo's trademark cigar and suit of clothes are found *"in the flies"* at the other end of the line of rope on which the dead prestidigitator dangles lifelessly.

El Rondo belatedly discovers that the wrong ghost is at the other end of his rope!

The "Little Pipsqueak" makes time with the beautiful dame in this atrociously-lettered panel from *Kill Happy*, by Jack Katz.

This story isn't nearly as good as *The Corpse That Came To Dinner* but you'll never find me complaining about the plot of a Reed Crandall story. Crandall is one of a class of great but *under*-recognized comic book artists. Along with artists like Bob Powell, Basil Wolverton and—*yes*—even Rudy Palais, his reputation suffers from having worked mainly for secondary publishers and titles. *Not* to say that Reed Crandall is an unknown. That's hardly the case. But his rep would be bigger by great multiples if he had spent the first half of the 1950's with EC and the rest of that decade and the next drawing major titles for big companies like DC and Atlas.

After the great double-Crandall issue, **Out of the Shadows** is hard-pressed to come up with an installment which even approaches such greatness. An oddity worthy of note is that both **OoS #9** and **#10** contain stories with the title *Till Death Do Us Part*. You may remember that I mentioned earlier that this is one of the most common titles in *Pre-Code Horror*. I must admit that I didn't realize at the time that an example could be found when a publisher used it in consecutive issues of the same title for two completely different and apparently unrelated stories! This is at least the third appearance of this name in Standard's output since it may also be found in **The Unseen #9,** which incidentally came out about the same time as these two. Some Standard writer must have had marriage and/or death (some—but not *me*, I hasten to add—might consider these concepts identical) in his mind when these tales were scripted!

Some strange kind of internal swipery may have been at work in these days since **Out of the Shadows #11** contains a story, *The Wig*, which is very similar to *The Fatal Strand*, discussed earlier in connection with **Adventures into Darkness #8.** In *The Wig*, by a capable artist named Mike Roy, a barber doesn't appreciate the humor of one of his wiseguy customers and proceeds to cut the man's throat. The only feature of the victim which does appeal to the bald barber is his rich blonde hair. Hairless Leon makes a wig out of the golden locks (after the obligatory but always perfunctory panel in which the corpse is hastily buried in the basement) only to quickly discover that the wig has "ideas" of its own. In a conclusion quite reminiscent of the earlier tale, the wig strangles the bad guy and then, like some kind of primeval tribble, waddles downstairs to join the rest of the golden jokester's body parts in the makeshift grave.

OoS #12 offers a couple of signed Alex Toth stories, drawn in collaboration with Mike Peppe; one's about a fanatical clock collector who pays big time for stealing the timepiece *"that he can't have"* and the other about a desert treasure and a "djenoun", which we are told is the *"spirit of the ancient kings of the desert."* The collaboration isn't all that fruitful: I'd prefer straight Toth artwork, and in any case, my preference runs to a double dose of Crandall. Actually, the best story in this issue is Jack Katz's *Kill Happy*, about a half-pint hood who reasons that with a *"tall, beautiful girl"* beside him, he can achieve the success, wealth and power he's always desired. This is actually a pure crime story: perhaps it was originally intended for Standard's **Crime Files,** a title which had recently died after only two unimpressive issues. It does however showcase Katz's qualities and the more I see his stuff, the more I grow to appreciate his unusual style.

Out of the Shadows #14 is the last issue and perhaps this is why Standard pulls out all the stops with a very short (3 pages) tale *Junk Man's Treasure* in which yet another taboo is broken: decapitated heads. Some local toughs wonder what the old junk man might have in his decrepit shack. Spiv, Chet and Danny reason that tightwad misers who live like beggars frequently have oodles of accumulated loot buried in their junk. The witless trio ignore the radio reporting the continuing discovery of headless corpses by *"the savage killer on the rampage."* Well, luckless Chet is elected to do the break-in and he quickly discovers that the junk man is yet another obsessive collector: his specialty is the human head! It's strangely appropriate that the most graphic and extreme panel ever published by Standard appeared in the company's very last *Pre-Code Horror* comic book!

Standard Space Opera: Fantastic Worlds & Lost Worlds

Standard published two very short-lived science fiction comics: **Fantastic Worlds** and **Lost Worlds.** Both titles came along during the beginning of Standard's boom period—late 1952—and neither lasted beyond the first month of 1953. Originally I included these comics in my *Terrology* listing of *Pre-Code Horror comics*. This was in error. There's nothing horrific in any of the stories.

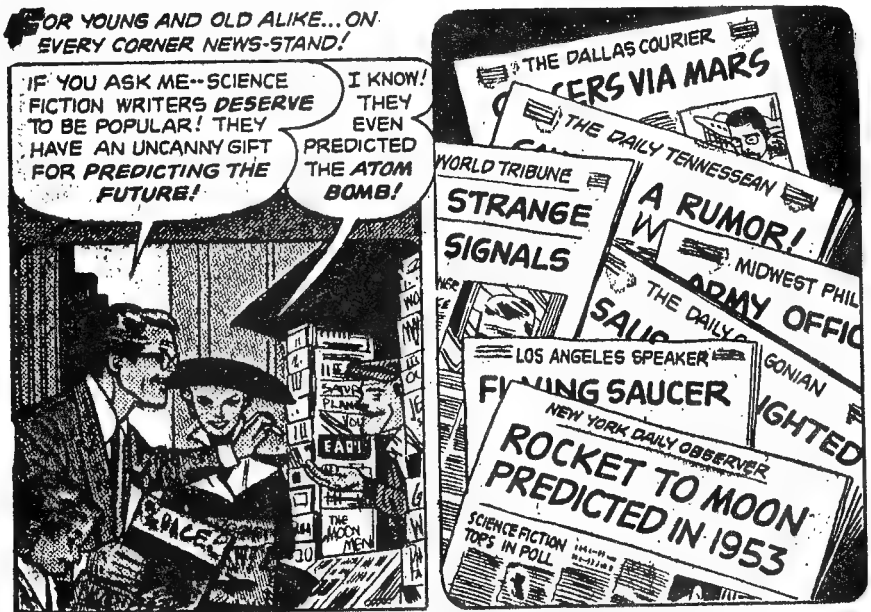
The eccentric junk collector has a strange hobby, in *Junk Man's Treasure,* from the 14th and last issue of **Out of the Shadows.**

The science fiction is of the "space opera" variety which, except perhaps for EC, afflicted all comic books purporting to deal with tales of the future. Standard's first sci-fi offering, **Fantastic Worlds #5,** does open with *Triumph Over Terror,* a decent story serving to introduce the reader to the fascinating "worlds of tomorrow" offered by writers of sci-fantasy. I'm always intrigued by self-reflective stories in Pre-Code comics—EC is the only company to do it regularly, even to the point of having "characters" like Bill Gaines, Al Feldstein and Wally Wood actually appear in the stories. In this Toth tale, the world's greatest science fiction writers are invited to a party by a wealthy publisher. They are suitably impressed by the rich man's "fake" flying saucer and by the realistic aliens roaming the grounds. It turns out, however, that the aliens *are* "real" (but stereotypically scaly, green and lizard-like). Although they refer to the writers as "Earthians", we never find out where the "inhuman monsters" come from. Apparently, the aliens plan <sigh> to invade the Earth and they've kidnapped the planet's greatest science fiction minds because of their uncanny ability to predict the future in their works. The aliens fear that the writers are gifted with more than just imagination and creative talent. They worry that the earthlings' precognitive abilities will provide Earth with advance warning. The aliens more than meet their match in a flying saucer full of crafty fiction writers: when they turn their patented "microscanner" onto one writer in order to read his mind, the images projected show that even after an unanticipated sneak attack, humankind would resist with "a courage you could never hope to equal" in tones evoking Pearl Harbor, which we in the present must remember took place only a decade before this story was published. The aliens are suitably terrorized and they send the science fiction writers home so as to avoid antagonizing the now intimidating earthly authorities.

We aren't going to devote much more space to **Fantastic Worlds** and its short-lived sister since *Terrology* is about horror comics and there isn't much to be said anyway about these forgettable Standard science fiction comics. Despite their pretensions about aspiring to a futuristic, forward-thinking point of view, the stories could take place in the Wild West or European battlefields of the last century with little alterations outside of names and clothing. Aliens are invariably monstrous and evil and earthly explorers—all of whom possess the ability to speak in airless vacuums, breathe on the surface of strange new worlds and communicate with any being however alien without benefit of translational devices—seek either to kill them, steal from them or imprison them. RUDY PALAIS makes a brief appearance in *Doom in the Depths,* which appears in Standard's swan song of science fiction: **Fantastic Worlds #7.** This is Rudy at his most bland—not a drop of sweat to be seen and the monsters (a race of hostile pygmies) don't come close to his usual high level of *weirdness.*

In Summary

If you glean from the above that Standard doesn't rank among the most memorable *Pre-Code Horror* publishers, then *congratulations!,* you've been paying attention. However, the company is certainly not one of the worst and its output has enjoyable and interesting features and is certainly worth checking out. The typical Standard horror comic offers a nice cover, four to five decent, if rarely exceptional stories and a couple of pages of mediocre filler material. Occasionally, Standard can shine—particularly with exceptional covers and with stories created by artists like Alex Toth and Reed Crandall. Jack Katz is another Standard craftsman whose work deserves a closing mention. A major selling point for Standard among collectors is that the company's comics are still relatively cheap by Price Guide standards—you can still find them for under ten bucks in low grade. I can't say much bad about a *Pre-Code Horror* comic that can be purchased for seven or eight bucks!



The meritorious skills of science fiction writers are praised in a self-reflective story from Standard's first sci-fi comic, **Fantastic Worlds #5.** Unfortunately, the comic-reading public wasn't impressed and two issues later, the title was history.

Errata & Trivia

The Mystery Artist Contest

We finally have a winner in THE MYSTERY ARTIST CONTEST, announced in the *Terrology* feature on Story Comics back in **Tales Too Terrible #5.** It should come as no surprise to regular readers that the artist whose unsigned work appeared often in Story's horror and crime magazines was identified by Eric Margolis, MD, collector supreme of esoteric and unusual comic books. The name supplied by Eric is:

Edward Goldfarb.

Eric supplies convincing proof in the form of a photocopy of the splash page of an Atlas story drawn by Goldfarb and signed by him.

A number of names were submitted in response to the challenge, including notables like Al Williamson, Steve Ditko, Bill Benulis and Bill Discount. James E. Harkin of Brooklyn Park, MN offered a spirited endorsement of RALPH MAYO, including several page references to Atlas and ACG comics where Mayo's work with Williamson had aspects reminiscent of some of Goldfarb's Story work. To no avail, however, as Dr. Margolis is no doubt correct. Goldfarb is best remembered for his efforts with Bob Baer, usually signed as Goldfarb-Baer. But let's let the contest winner speak for himself:

Dear George:

Your "Mystery Artist" is **EDWARD GOLDFARB.** He was a mystery as his Story art is generally not signed; his work with Bob Baer is generally signed (by Baer's signature) but the heavy inking style (a la "George Roussos school") obscures the Goldfarb style. Here is a rare signed story in an Atlas title.

As a last point, I would add that Goldfarb may not have been proud of his Story work, or his comic art in general, which is almost never signed when he works solo. Bob Baer was evidently quite proud of his work as his stuff is always signed whether as part of the Goldfarb-Baer team, or with his own rare solo work.

Re Ralph Mayo, I have supplied a splash page from a late '40s Chesler title signed by him which shows that his own style is quite distinctive from The Mystery Artist's.

"Bad" comic book sci-fi is always characterized by scenes like this.

The real "Chesler artist" treasure is Paul Gattuso, of The Echo and Black Dwarf renown. When are you going to reprint him?

Eric Margolis

Eric also supplies a Goldfarb Story checklist which I've compared to the one I offered in TTTTT **#5.** It differs from mine in including Goldfarb-Baer teamups in the early issues (Dark Mysteries #1-3, Fight Against Crime #1-3 & 6 and Mysterious Adventures #2- 3). It also includes two later issues I didn't list (FAC 16 & 23) and lacks two I did (MyA 20 & 22). I'll have to check these out and report back to the readership in a future *Terrology* Errata column.

Well, since we're jumping the gun on this issue's letter column, let's call it quits for now. Watch for the next *Terrology* to focus its attention on HARVEY COMICS, one of the best *Pre-Code Horror* publishers—in about two month's time!

© 1993 Marvel Entertainment

A rare signed story is convincing proof that THE MYSTERY ARTIST is Ed Goldfarb of Goldfarb-Baer "fame."

We've got a tad more space: let's run one more panel showing some *classic* **Reed Crandall** faces in turmoil: the maniacal El Rondo and the beautiful but dumb-as-a-brick Carla.

during the April-June quarter of 1952. **Tomb of Terror** was born in June as a monthly. We can deduce that this period is the "peak" of Harvey horror production. The glut starting hitting the *Pre-Code Horror* market in the second half of 1952; demand could no longer support so many monthly comics and all four comics went to bimonthly schedules by the end of 1952.

Harvey horror comics are fairly common: completing the runs isn't all that difficult. It can be *expensive* as the Guide values tend to be fairly high: particularly all the issues with art by **HOWARD NOSTRAND** and **BOB POWELL.** A large number of high-grade Harvey comics emerged from a warehouse find of a few years ago. I can recall attending a New York convention back in the mid-80s and being shocked to find several dealers in the room with extensive wall displays of high-grade Harvey horror! Apparently, the treasure trove of near mint comics was being distributed among some comic dealers in the Big Apple many of whom had coincidentally booked themselves into the same show. I was both pleased *and* irritated since I had been painstaking assembling a high-grade set only to find them now all available with little effort—beyond paying the price. The "price" was full Price Guide; apparently the sudden emergence of all these primo copies was not considered significant enough to force market prices downwards in New York City.

In reality, because of this warehouse find, Harvey comics in high grade are rather *common* today and collectors should keep this in mind in making their purchases. I've heard that the quantities involved were in the range of 40-200 copies per issue. Even if only the lower range was accurate, this represents a fairly sizable surge in this population of high-grade magazines. Harvey comics of the era are popular but not as much so as the output of publishers like EC, DC and Atlas for which a comparable source of high-grade copies does not exist. (Even the Gaines file EC's did not amount to more than 13 copies per issue.) There is no doubt in my mind that the Harvey warehouse find should have had a *deptessing* impact on market values for the titles involved—especially for the "ordinary" issues: those without any name artists. This impact wasn't evident back when the find first hit the market; but it has been noticeable in the flat rate at which these comics have appreciated since then. While most copies of the horror comics seem to have been dispersed into collectors' hands, there are still dealers remaining to this day with stocks of warehouse Harveys in their inventory.

I should describe in more detail the condition of these warehouse comics. The copies I've seen are unread and have that kind of nice, fresh-from-the-press appearance; most of the covers are extremely *glossy* and quite gorgeous—as they should be since they have had almost no exposure to light. The bright gloss of the covers is the biggest selling point. The comics involved were stored in large stacks in a warehouse which was most certainly not air-conditioned. There has been exposure to heat since some *browning* has affected virtually every Harvey warehouse comic I've ever seen. The browning is most noticeable along the edges of the interior pages. This phenomenon leads me to think that some of the stacks were exposed to light along their sides. This browning varies in location from comic to comic but it seems consistently to appear along one edge of the comic's pages. Many warehouse Harveys also show browning of the covers: this is particularly evident on copies with back covers that are predominantly white. The collector who is content to seal up his high-grade treasure in Mylar with an acid-free backing board is sure to be very content; those of us who like to examine our comics periodically are more apt to notice the browning.

These comics are very beautiful but strictly speaking should *not* be considered "MINT." Conservative grading does not allow even the terms NEAR MINT or VERY FINE to be applied to comics with browning pages. Since the browning (some might prefer to say "tanning") on these comics is only on page edges, and since the condition is otherwise so very, very nice, one could argue that a reasonable grade for them is VF with particularly nice examples being assessed as NM. Because of the glut of warehouse Harveys on the back issue market, truly near mint or mint Harvey horror comics (with white or near-white pages) should command premium prices as they are very hard to find. When I attended that convention in New York, I had eight or so near mint Harvey horror comics in my collection and have since come to appreciate their *scarcity* in this prime condition as I've only been able to add a couple of non-warehouse high-grade examples in the intervening years. If non-warehouse high-grades exist... then they must all be locked away in private collections and rarely appear on the market.

Harvey's "Big 3" Artists

BOB POWELL Checklist

(19) Black Cat Mystery #32-35,36(2),40,41,43-52*,53*
(18) Chamber of Chills #1-8,11,13†,15†,16†,18-21,23-24,25*
(13) Tomb of Terror #1,3,5,9-14,15†,16,17*,18*
(20) Witches Tales #1,3-5,6(2),7,10,11,14†,17†,19-26,27(2)*
A total of 70 stories; 63 original.

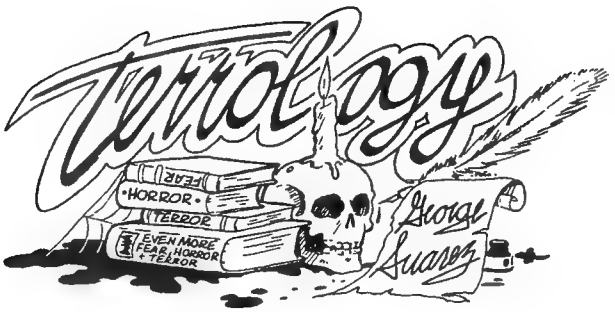
HOWARD NOSTRAND Checklist

(7) Black Cat Mystery #44-49,51
(8.5) Chamber of Chills #13†**,15†,16†,17-21,22‡,23,24
(6.5) Tomb of Terror #8-12,13‡,15†**,16
(9) Witches Tales #14†,16‡,17†,18-25
A total of 31 stories (30 original) plus a few miscellaneous one-page fillers. Nostrand also drew the cover to CoC #21.

RUDY PALAIS Checklist

(16) BC Mystery #30,31(2),32(2),33-35,36(2),37-40,52*,53*
(7) Chamber of Chills #1,2,8,11,12,14,16
(6) Tomb of Terror #2,3,5-7,17*
(14) Witches Tales #1,2,4(2),5(2),7-9,12,14,15,17,28*
A total of 43 stories (39 original.)

*Story reprinted from an earlier Harvey comic.
‡Issue contains only a one-page filler piece.
**Nostrand story in ToT #15 was reprinted from CoC #13.
†Story considered to be a joint effort of both Powell & Nostrand. Each artist is credited here with *half* a story. Since Nostrand worked for Powell's studio, his work may appear in the backgrounds a lot of the later Powell stories. Powell frequently worked by drawing faces and having his assistants fill in the rest. This is a major reason why so many comic stories have been attributed to Powell: he didn't have to draw them entirely to get the artistic credit! Stories marked † are worth distinguishing specially because they have obvious overtones of both Powell and Nostrand's style in facial features. I would be interested in hearing from any readers who differ with my judgment on any of these.



Chapter 8:
Harvey

Black Cat Mystery #30-53 . . . . . Aug 51-Dec 54
Formerly Black Cat Comics; #29 has a witch on cover but contents are super-hero/crime.
Chamber of Chills #21-24,5-26 . . . Jun 51-Dec 54
Tomb of Terror #1-16 . . . . . Jun 52-Jul 54
Title changes to:
Thrills of Tomorrow #17-18 . . . . . Oct 54-Dec 54
Both reprints from earlier issues.
Witches Tales #1-28 . . . . . Jan 51-Dec 54
Becomes Witches Western Tales for #29-30.

Harvey published 96 horror comics in five titles from January 1951 to December 1954. The last two issues of each title consisted entirely of reprints.

HARVEY COMICS was the fourth most prolific publisher of *Pre-Code Horror Comics;* its count of 96 magazines ranks one behind Ace and five ahead of **EC.** Any company whose output of horror comics exceeds EC's has to be considered a real powerhouse in *Pre-Code Horror* production! EC fanatics can take some heart, however: the last two installments of each Harvey title consisted entirely of reprints—subtracting those would leave Harvey trailing EC in terms of *original* material by a score of 91-88.

Harvey Comics had been publishing comics for at least a decade before the horror craze began sweeping the comics world in 1950. This is the first company *Terrology* has focused on which had a substantial publishing history prior to the *Pre-Code Horror* era. Some of Harvey's Golden Age creations include titles like **Green Hornet, Black Cat, Champ, Speed, All-New** and **Hello Pal.** Harvey's *post*-Code output would include that world famous pint-sized zillionaire, **Richie Rich,** whose adventures were related in an astonishing array of titles in the 1960's and 1970's.

Harvey's *Pre-Code Horror* stories appeared in four comics all of which ran quite a bit longer than most competing titles. **Witches Tales** began in January of 1951, to be followed by **Chamber of Chills** in June and **Black Cat Mystery** in August of that same year. **Tomb of Terror** was the baby of the bunch: born a year later in June 1952. Apparently, Harvey may have planned to add a fifth title, **Inferno of Fear,** shortly thereafter. This info is gleaned from the *Christie's Auction Catalog* for October 31, 1992, which states that the artwork for **Chamber of Chills #15** (Jan 1953) is marked as originally intended for something called **Inferno of Fear #1.** However, plans must have been changed for reasons unbeknownst to us since this interesting new horror label never graced a magazine cover.

Black Cat Mystery starts its horror run with #30; the first 29 issues relate the adventures of a female super-hero known as the **Black Cat**—a run which began in summer 1946. Issue #29 is labeled **Black Cat Mystery** on the cover but the "Mystery" is quite tiny and the contents are basically adventure/crime. The "witch" featured on the cover and in the lead Black Cat story is simply an ugly old crook. I don't count this comic as a Harvey horror comic although you might want to include it in your Harvey horror collection as an interesting transitional issue—a horror "try-out" issue like EC's **War Against Crime #10.**

Chamber of Chills' first issue is listed as #21 and this numbering continues for three more issues; at that point the Post Office must have caught on (like they did with EC's **Weird Science** and **Weird Fantasy**) and Harvey corrected the numbering sequence with #5. Novice Harvey collectors should note that as a result there are two different issues each of **Chamber of Chills #21-24.** The predecessor title is unknown to me and apparently to **Overstreet Price Guide** and the **Gerber Photo-Journal**—does any reader know the *pre*-Pre-Code title from which CoC was spawned?

During the Pre-Code era, Harvey produced a large variety of war, romance and humor comics, not to mention strip-reprint titles like **Joe Palooka, Blondie, Dick Tracy,** etc. Many of Harvey's horror artists also worked for the war and romance comics, lending a strange commonality of style across the company's output in these three very different genres.

All four of Harvey's horror titles died in December 1954—victims of the impending *Comics Code.* The comic with the most "extreme" title, **Tomb of Terror,** had changed its title to **Thrills of Tomorrow** with the June issue. The female super-hero character returned to **Black Cat Mystery** with #54; I don't consider this a horror comic. Similarly, **Chamber of Chills** turned into a weak-kneed crime comic—**Chamber of Clues**— for two issues and **Witches Tales** made the most amazing transformation into a cowboy comic with the strange hybrid moniker **Witches Western Tales.** A further mutation into straight **Western Tales** occurred after a pair of installments. So ended with a whimper the Harvey *Pre-Code Horror* era!

Harvey was one of the more popular horror publishers of the 1950's and this is evident in the number of copies surviving. The first three titles started as bimonthlies but doubtlessly due to burgeoning demand, they all were put on monthly schedules

TERROLOGY

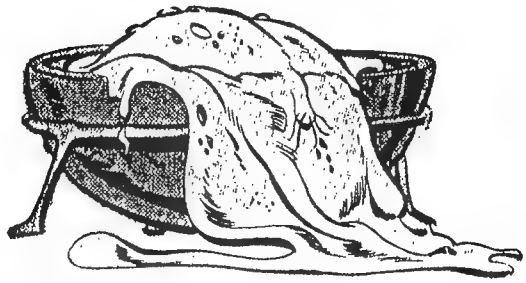
TERROLOGY is the name of an **Index/Collector's Guide to the Pre-Code Horror Comics** which will be written and published by NEC sometime in the next couple of years. This book will be a complete and detailed review of every horror comic published prior to the advent of the *Comics Code* in 1955. *Terrology* will be compiled via direct access to copies of every such comic and will, we hope, include hundreds of full color cover repros as well as representative interior art. This work will be intended as a 'scholarly' examination of an important period in the history of the development of the comic book. While accessible by all, *Terrology* will be specifically targeted toward the serious collector/fan of *Pre-Code Horror.* In the meantime, while **TTTTT** comes out periodically, *Terrology* will appear as the title of a column in which I will attempt to provide the comic reader with some basic background info about the fascinating world of 1950's **Pre-Code Horror Comics.**

By contrast, in the last decade, the *coin-collecting* hobby has begun to appreciate the distinction between high-grade and "really high-grade". Coin collectors formerly used "mint-state" designations like "about uncirculated", "uncirculated" and "brilliant uncirculated" akin to the comic fan's NM, M and Pristine Mint. Now the mint grade for coins has been broken down into 11 sub-grades—all the way from an "ordinary" 60 points to a "perfect" 70 points. The value of the coins involved rises geometrically from 60 to 70: the difference can involve factors in the hundreds: a MS-60 1880 New Orleans silver dollar books for about $40; a MS-65 example of the same coin lists at *forty thousand dollars*. The comics hobby is moving in this direction with the multiple-Guide premiums demanded for pedigree comics from the *Edgar Church* and similar collections. Since comics age a lot more poorly than coins, expect to see high-grade old comics with near-white pages command higher and higher multiples as time passes.

Okay, back to the subject at hand. Harvey published some truly great horror comics. While in terms of subject matter, the company would have to be considered one of the "tamer" publishers of the era, the creative staff frequently produced some really hair-raising tales. Howard Nostrand, in an interview in **Graphic Story Magazine #16,** comments *"Harvey had a sort of chicken attitude about horror stuff... Granted, they get a little ghastly every once in a while but generally speaking,... they wanted to keep it in fairly good taste."* This judgment is accurate. Sure, we'll find the occasional decapitated head and bloody corpse in a Harvey horror story but the publisher never became dependent upon such devices for selling its comics. In fact, as we'll see shortly, Harvey was one of the few *Pre-Code Horror* publishers to make an effort to sell horror heavily laced with humor.

Most of the credit for the best stories must be awarded to Harvey's three most notable artists: the aforementioned Bob Powell and Howard Nostrand, and one whose work we've already discussed in the context of Comic Media: **RUDY PALAIS.** These three talents drew over one-third of Harvey's entire horror output. (The counts are Powell 70, Palais 43 and Nostrand 31 for a total of 144 out of the approximately 400 Harvey horror stories.) They produced most of what deserves mention: the rest of the output was mostly done by undistinguished journeymen. (Exception: **SID CHECK** drew three stories worthy of note in **WT 24, BCM 50** and **ToT 14.**) Powell's work appears throughout the entire history of these comics; Palais's efforts are found in the first half of the runs with Nostrand effectively replacing him in the last half. (Palais and Nostrand coexist in only one issue: **CoC 16.**) Only four Harvey horror comics—one from each title—are completely devoid of "Big Three" artwork: **BCM 42, CoC 9, ToT 4** and **WT 13. Witches Tales #16** contains only a one-page Nostrand spot illo on the table of contents page—a panel excerpted from Nostrand's first Harvey effort, *Man-Germ* in **Chamber of Chills #13.** Only *one* Harvey horror comic contains the efforts of ALL three: **Witches Tales #14,** and this one only weakly qualifies since Nostrand & Powell are included as part of a joint effort on the same story: one which best displays the talents of neither artist. (Realizing the danger of the reader drowning in such trivia, or even worse, falling asleep on me, I hasten to add that the aforementioned story *Man-Germ* was reprinted in recolored form later in **Tomb of Terror #15.** Other than the final two issues of all four titles which, as mentioned at the start of this article, were complete reprints, this is the only case I've discovered of a horror story being reprinted by this company during the *Pre-Code Horror* era.)

Powell slime-monster spares neither mother nor child—from **Witches Tales #4.**



Yet another slithering Powell creature is spawned in **WT #10.**

Most issues of all four titles from 1953 through 1954 contain stories by both Nostrand *and* Powell and accordingly, collectors have to pay the biggest premium for these. (Analogous to EC science fiction comics with Williamson and Wood stories!) Palais commands no Price Guide premium; so his work, if you like it, is the best bargain.

Another artist who must be mentioned in the context of Harvey is **LEE ELIAS.** Elias handled many Harvey horror covers as well as interior stories. Elias was an editor as well and apparently had enough seniority to reserve many "plum" cover assignments. In fact, Elias is the *ONLY* artist ever to sign any artwork done for Harvey and all his signatures appear on the covers (but he doesn't sign *every* cover.) This makes it quite difficult to identify many of the journeymen who produced the remainder

of the company's horror output. Elias' occasional interior work isn't interesting enough to offer a complete checklist but you can find examples in **WT #s 6, 8 & 19; BCM #s 30 & 39** and **ToT 4.**

Harvey's horror artists also worked extensively in the company's war and romance comics of the 1950's. In particular, Bob Powell did some wonderful work in the love titles. His distinctive style is eminently suited to both the gruesome and the gorgeous! While female beauty wasn't Harvey's major strategy for enticing male readers (like it certainly was for Superior and Story, two publishers we've already discussed in *Terrology),* that which does appear is always drawn by Powell. Elias' ladies are too child-like; Palais' women (like all his characters) sweat too much; and Nostrand, just like Jack Davis, tends to draw mannish, hard-edged females (reminiscent of Mammy Yokum or Granny Clampett, regardless of their age!) If you disagree... well, point me out me a really attractive-looking woman drawn by either Nostrand or Davis. It'll take some looking...

If you enjoy Powell's work in horror, you really should check out some of his romance stories. In fact, if you like Powell, check out ANYTHING drawn by him and you can't go too far wrong! Powell had a studio where he employed a number of assistants (including Nostrand for a time) and the group produced hundreds of stories for a great number of publishers from the 1940's through the early 1960's. (Powell died in 1969. Some of his last work was for Marvel Comics: **Daredevil #9-11,** although you won't recognize much of his style in these stories.)

While it's true that Powell never signed any of his stories for Harvey, certain issues contain what some Powell collectors call "*Powell-isms*" inserted into stories which identify their origin. For example, in "*The Lost Souls*" in **Chamber of Chills #24 (#4),** the opening splash has a poster in the background which says "ELECT HONEST BOB POWELL". It's hard to see and most readers (and editors!) would miss it. In *The Choir Master,* a story in **CoC 21,** a radio microphone bears the call-signal "WSRP" (S. Robert Powell.) The story *League of the Damned!* in **Witches Tales #7** has more poster fun: this one reads: "FUN AT STRAND NOSTRAND AND EPP." Martin Epp was another Powell assistant. In **Tomb of Terror #15's** *Communist,* a sports headline reads "EPP BEATS POWELL IN CLOSE RACE." Powell was apparently a racing fan: during this same time his studio drew seven issues of an auto racing comic **(Hot Rod Comics)** for Fawcett. Just looking for these markers in Powell stories can while away a few hours whenever you've got time to kill!

Mother Mongoose's Nursery Crimes was a regular filler feature in **Witches Tales,** by Nostrand.

Before taking a look at Harvey title by title, let's discuss some general Harvey characteristics and "trivia." **Witches Tales,** Inc. is the company listed as the publisher in the indicia of the two earliest "pure" horror titles: **Witches Tales** and **Chamber of Chills.** The indicia of **Black Cat Mystery** shows Home Comics, Inc. and when **Tomb of Terror** came along, its indicia lists Harvey Publications, Inc.

All four titles were obviously produced by the same editorial and creative people. House ads appearing in some issues promoting the other horror titles as well as some of Harvey's non-horror output. But many issues, particularly early numbers, offer very little promotional evidence that they are part of the Harvey line of comics. Unlike Harvey's humor and strip reprint publications, the Harvey company name doesn't appear very often inside the early horror comics. Also, an interesting fact is that of the 96 Harvey horror comics, only ten display the company's cover logo on the cover: **Black Cat Mystery #34-43.** It isn't unusual for a comics publisher to play down its involvement in publishing horror comics. But why the Harvey logo appeared on this one stretch of one title and nowhere else in the company's horror output is a mystery to me.

Harvey was one of the few *Pre-Code Horror* publishers to promote subscriptions heavily. Full-page ads periodically trumpet subs for each title at the bargain price of 12 issues for a buck or, even better, 25 issues for two bucks. This was a real good deal: EC charged *MORE* than cover price for its subs. (Of course, EC used real manila envelopes.)

Most Harvey horror comics have an opening table of contents with a list of story titles, a sample of panel art from each story and very brief promotional commentary about the "world of infinite horror" found within. What passes for Harvey's only reader interaction appears here in the form of very brief excerpts from reader mail, always complimentary to the nth degree. Early issues of **Witches Tales** briefly ran a separate letter

A killer rabbit roam the laboratory in *Transformation!,* a story from **Witches Tales #14.**

column, soliciting readers to share their *"Strange Experiences"* with the audience.

Like most such publishers, the letter columns were eventually dropped. I wonder why. Even EC was unable to maintain an interesting rapport with readers in its horror comics. By 1953, EC was reduced to printing exceedingly bad poems set to the music of popular songs of the '50s. The only other publisher to maintain letter columns throughout the *Pre-Code* era was ACG and their content is so vacuously complimentary as to be unreadable!

Speaking of tables of contents, a few *Pre-Code* publishers used this device and I find it to be a waste. The page could have been better spent appended to a story. Sure, *sure*, 'tis true that I use this technique at the beginning of **Tales Too Terrible.** But TTTTT is a 72-page magazine containing articles as well as stories with an audience whose average age is quite a bit higher than the typical horror comic reader of 1952. I don't think too many 12-year-olds bother to read this kind of all-too-obvious in-house hype.

In spring 1954 Harvey did use its tables of contents to trumpet a *"COUP D'ETAT"!* Here's how the trumpet sounded: *"The four greatest weird books, in announcing a new policy, have pulled one of the most terrifying coup d'etats in the sanctified realm of horror."* What was the big news? Well, Harvey had decided to specialize each of its four bimonthly horror titles. **Black Cat Mystery** would deal with "real-life" horror, **Witches Tales** would focus on horror designed to "tickle your funny bone", **Chamber of Chills** would be devoted to tales of the supernatural and **Tomb of Terror** would deal with the horrific in science fiction. This coup d'etat took place with **Black Cat Mystery #49, Chamber of Chills #22, Witches Tales #24** and **Tomb of Terror #14.** This change of flavor is most apparent in the last two titles. **Witches Tales** managed to inject some humor into its horror by way of Howard Nostrand. Although I'm sure he's sick of hearing about it, Nostrand's drawing style is very similar to that of EC's JACK DAVIS: both styles lend themselves very well to comedy. Starting with the preannouncement issue #13, **Tomb of Terror's** covers display a variety of exciting outer space themes—including the notorious exploding robot face on #15.

Georgie Porgie pays for his unchivalrous behavior in this *Nursery Crime* from **Witches Tales #20.**

I find it quite interesting that Harvey would transform **Tomb of Terror** into a sci-fi title around the same time that EC was admitting in print that two of the company's greatest titles, **Weird Science** and **Weird Fantasy,** were losing money so badly that their last hope for survival lay in being fused into a single quarterly magazine with the unheard-of tariff of 15 cents! Apparently Harvey hadn't yet discovered what publishers like EC, Avon, Standard, Atlas and others had found: science fiction comics *don't* sell!

OK, it's about time to assign a "flagship" title. There's no question in my mind here: it's got to be **Witches Tales,** the first and longest-running horror comic from the company. (Note how **Witches Tales** is spelled: it's not Witch's Tales or even Witches' Tales, although it does appear as the latter in an early house ad in issue #2.) **Witches Tales** is also the only Harvey title to have some kind of "host" character—although the grinning witch who appears on the cover and the opening table of contents has no personality or proper name; in fact, I'm not sure her visage is ever redrawn in four years!

Witches Tales

Every issue of **Witches Tales** bears the subtitles "WEIRD YARNS OF UNSEEN TERROR" and "WE DARE YOU TO READ THESE EERIE TALES OF SUPERNATURAL HORROR." Actually, that is, until the last two reprint issues which, with the fearsome *Comics Code* rapidly approaching, toned down the hype to "THRILLING YARNS OF SUSPENSE." (Regular readers of *Terrology* will be reminded that words like WEIRD and TERROR were real *No-No's* for the Comics Code people.)

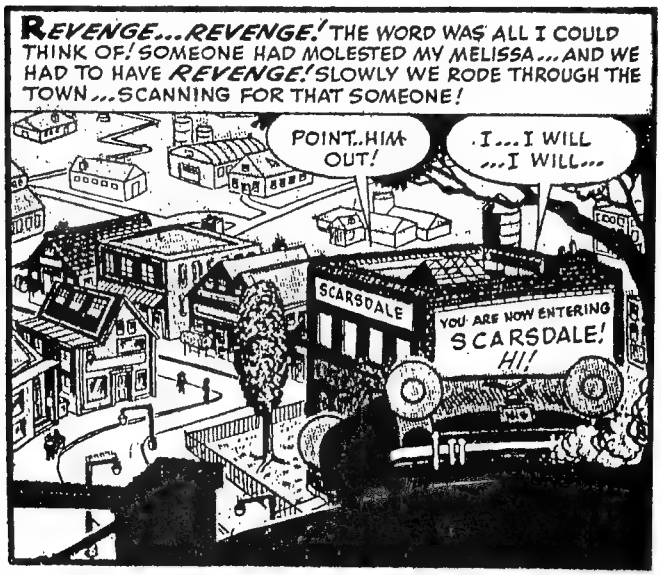
Six of the first nine covers of **Witches Tales** feature bondage scenes. Also prominently displayed are torture, ghouls and various demonic forces. This style of horror is evident also in the parallel early issues of **Chamber of Chills.** The torture covers of **Witches Tales #5** and **Chamber of Chills #7** are very reminiscent of each other with their unsettling display of bound, tortured and haggard victims. By issue #10 a definite style change has set in. While the subsequent covers don't become exactly tame, bondage and torture are completely replaced for the rest of the run with a collection of monsters, witches, devils, skeletons and mad scientists. Harvey takes us completely by surprise, however, with #25, which features a bloody, decapitated head being used as a bell clapper by a madman. This cover stands out as exceptional in its extremism in the **Witches Tales** run and I find myself intrigued as to how it ever got approved. Even EC never offered anything this extreme on its covers. For a company which obviously exercised discretion in composing its horror output, Harvey really went the limit with this cover. Surprisingly, the same thing occurs on rare occasion with Harvey's other titles. The average Harvey horror comic cover is fairly tame but the exceptions... well, they are quite exceptional.

We have yet to discuss a horror title in *Terrology* whose early issues are the *best* of the run and Harvey's titles are no exception to this phenomenon. Powell's effort in **WT 3,** *Tombstones to Tibet,* is a (rare for him) completely forgettable tale of a doomed expedition to an enchanted Himalayan mountain. Powell heats up in **issue #4** with *Sewer Monsters,* in which prototypically disgusting Powell-esque monsters are enlisted by a Frenchman in a plot to overthrow the aristocracy. This issue is also notable for its back cover ad promoting the first issue of Harvey's second horror title, **Chamber of Chills** (with that infuriatingly inexplicable issue #21 prominently featured on its cover!) and an offer from the Harvey witch of $2.00 to readers for each letter printed in the magazine. This was very generous and clearly indicates that Harvey was very interested in reader feedback. Two bucks was a lot of dough back in 1951. Remember, comics were just 10 cents each. Imagine the reader response! (How quick would you drop us a line if we promised you forty dollars!?) Harvey ran several letters in **WT 5** along with an extension of the monetary offer. However, the budget must have run dry shortly thereafter since the letter column is discontinued and no such offer tendered in future issues.

Witches Tales #8 contains the first house ad for the next Harvey horror title, **Black Cat Mystery.** The inside back cover touts #s 33 & 34: *"We dare you to read... You'll thrill... You'll chill!"* The lead story by Lee Elias, *Toys of Terror!* is about dolls animated by an evil witch who prowl the earth ripping out the eyes of human beings to replace their own empty sockets.

Powell's *It!* in **Witches Tales #10** is another "prototypical" Powell—in more ways that one. The plot involves a protoplasmic blob—known only as *It!*—which goes around devouring its victims like an amoeba. Without taking the time to go dig them up, I can think of at least a half-dozen Powell horror stories which involve gelatinous blobs slithering around consuming screaming victims through osmotic processes.

Issue #11 is noteworthy only for a filler page about dreams by PETE MORISI, an artist who did most of his *Pre-Code Horror* work for Comic Media. These one-page fillers were common throughout Harvey's horror comics. Another company which made a lot of use of such padding was DC in its mystery titles. As we shall see, once Nostrand came on board, he ended up with the assignment of producing these for Harvey and they get more interesting at that time.



Ron seeks *Revenge!* for his wife in **Witches Tales #21.**

The best story in **issue #14** is *Transformation!* by an unknown artist. This tale is about a scientist whose formula transforms an innocent little bunny into a ferocious jungle beast. I'll be damned if that rabbit doesn't turn out rather terrifying! Rudy Palais finally cuts loose in **Witches Tales #15's** *Art for Death's Sake!* Palais' earlier stories in this title were very mild by his standards; that's why I haven't mentioned any until now. With this *mess*-terpiece, the pure Palais presence comes to the fore! As we've discussed in earlier **TTTTTs,** the quintessential Rudy P. involves characters who sweat heavily, constantly and disgustingly. I mean they sweat to beat the band! These folks would perspire while lying motionless in an air-conditioned room. When things really get hot, their pores open up good and they start sweating like hot wax candles! Rudy Palais aficionados will agree that I'm not exaggerating at all. His style is so exotic and wild that he's definitely worth the attention of any serious fan of esoteric comics. Note that I'm not claiming he's a great artist. In truth, if you want "great" art, visit museums instead of reading (most) old comics. Craftsmen like Palais are why old comics can be so much fun and that's the best reason to recommend them to comic fans of "discerning" taste!

With **Witches Tales #19,** the title starts moving toward the "humor in a jugular vein" approach—reminiscent of the early *Mad* comics. This issue introduces Nostrand's filler page series, *Mother Mongoose's Nursery Crimes,* which brutalizes an innocent nursery rhyme in the name of humorous horror. Fractured adaptions of childhood jingles occurred frequently among other *Pre-Code Horror* publishers: EC, Comic Media and Story, to name just three that come immediately to mind. Nostrand is a natural here with a grimly cartoony style which can make readers squirm and giggle at the same moment. In **issue #20's,** nursery rhyme, George Porgie kisses the girls and makes them cry and they respond in a particularly horrific way. This comic also contains a Powell tale, *Kiss and Tell,* in which two "beautiful people" meet at a social club, fall in love and get married, only to discover the bitter underlying truth: beauty is only skin-deep and sometimes, not even that profound!

Witches Tales #21 features a Powell story, *The Invasion,* in which a television dramatization of aliens attacking Earth leads a couple to commit suicide. If this one rings a bell..., well, it should! (Hint: think of a bell shaped like Orson Welles!) *Revenge,* by an artist unknown to me, is about Ron and Melissa, a couple truly in love. They're new in town and Melissa is brutally raped by a stranger. Ron finds her distraught and inconsolable. At her urging, he seeks out the assailant she identifies and slaughters the guy with a hammer. Exhausted by the effort, but satisfied that he has avenged his wife, he turns only to see Melissa pointing out yet another man as her assailant. If this story sounds familiar also, it should: its very similar to an EC tale found in an issue of **Shock Suspenstories.** Overstreet notes a number of "EC swipes" in Harvey's horror comics at this time. EC was certainly the pace-setter and Harvey's weren't the only writers to resort to borrowing from the

best (Story Comics practically redefined their horror titles around EC swipery right about the same time.) Needless to say, EC usually told the story better. EC's writers could be very subtle in dealing with very mature subject matter yet still succeed in getting the point across. For instance, I can't imagine an EC story where a woman is raped and tells her husband *"A man came... asked me for money! I screamed... he hit me... he made love to me!"*

The humorous undertone to horror in **Witches Tales** becomes more apparent with **issue #23,** with a silly cover of a lunatic coiffuring the hair of a cigarette-smoking skeleton! The stories inside are moving in the direction of "tickling your funny bone while tingling your spine!" *Ivan's-Woe,* by Nostrand, is a Wood-esque parody of medieval chivalry complete with a page of knightly battle highly reminiscent of a Wally Wood story in EC's **Two-Fisted Tales.** *So What's Next* is a nicely drawn Powell effort which completely telegraphs its ending: the attractive receptionist mistakes the janitor for the escaped madman and seeks safety in the arms of the mousy accountant who turns out to be... the escaped madman! EC did it *a lot* better...

Witches Tales #24 is the issue in which Harvey officially announces the *"COUP D'ETAT."* Events were moving rapidly in the world of comics in 1954 and Harvey had only another six months of horror publishing before the you-know-what hit the fan and everything crumbled to dust. The last three original issues of **Witches Tales** definitely have comedic overtones but the most apt description of them is *superficial.* **Issue #24's** *Undertaker* is about an mortician's son who tries to escape his fate as an apprentice to his grim dad, a man whose death wish is of psychotic proportions. Sonny hides himself in a coffin, planning to escape from the cemetery after burial. This young man is none too swift! He doesn't bring along any tools and seems to have no concern about getting through the thick coffin lid and six feet of tightly compacted soil. Of course, these problems are academic since this particular coffin is headed to... the crematorium! The real humor in this story is the *inanity* of the plot...

The later Harvey horror comics became "Atlas-like" in the sense that their stories consist only of a "germ" of an idea padded out to fill six pages. Consider Nostrand's minor classic *What's Happening at 8:30 P.M.* in **Witches Tales #25.** I call this a classic of sorts because it's quite atypical of comic book offerings during the '50s. Not because it contains much of a plot, however. This strange tale, colored mostly in reds, follows a biped ant-like creature, clad in a greenish overcoat, who is visiting a decaying city. Most of the neighborhood is uninhabited and the few fellow travelers he encounters are either on the lam or depressingly resigned to some unknown horrible fate. Our "hero", known only as "he", doesn't realize until the very last page the nature of his doom. Turns out he's a germ and the x-rays which will wipe out his kind are scheduled for 8:30 PM! See what I mean about a "germ" of an idea padded out to a full story?

Witches Tales effectively dies with #26. This comic has a story which parodies *Wuthering Heights.* Actually, **Witches Tales** contained a number of rather forgettable spoofs of classic fiction: earlier issues had lampooned (always from the horrifying point of view) *Mutiny on the Boundary* (#24), *Ali Barber and the Forty Thieves* (#25) and the already-mentioned *Ivanhoe*

A mousy librarian uses the black arts to conjure up a plague of rats against her boss. From *Book of Vengeance* in **Chamber of Chills #4.**

takeoff in #23. The problem with parodying great fiction is that the spoofer unavoidably finds himself compared to a writer of legendary stature. In the world of 1950's comics, this standard is infinitely too high and the result, especially when the writing is confined to seven pages of panel art, supremely inadequate.

Witches Tales #27 is a reprint of #6; the **28th** and final issue reprints #8. No explanation is offered for this: other than advertising, the only change noticeable is the editing out of the issue numbers from the original table of contents. With #29, the remarkable transformation to **Witches Western Tales** is made and the nameless Harvey witch gives way to Clay Duncan, Boy's Ranch and the non-controversial world of cowboys 'n' injuns!

Chamber of Chills

Overstreet comments about this title: *"About half the issues contain bondage, torture, sadism, perversion, gore, cannibalism, eyes ripped out, acid in face, etc."* This is a bit of an exaggeration. No doubt some of these appear in various issues of this comic—but not obviously more commonly than in its three sister horror titles. In the "coup d'etat" we discussed earlier, Harvey ostensibly allocated the realm of the supernatural to **Chamber of Chills.** But this didn't happen until 1954 and Overstreet's comment appears to cover the entire run. I see no evidence that **Chamber of Chills** was any more extreme than the others—certainly, most of these themes are common to many horror stories in *Pre-Code* comics and we've already encountered a lot of them in **Witches Tales.** In any case, let's look at the **Chamber of Chills** run in detail and assess the accuracy of this description.

I've noted that the first issue of CoC is numbered #21 for completely unknown reasons. I would really like to hear from anyone who can cast light on this mystery. As with **Witches Tales,** the early Harvey horror comics aren't particularly interesting. A couple of decent Powell hallucination/ghost stories appear in the 1st and 4th installments. **Issue #4** also contains *Book of Vengeance,* in which an assistant librarian uses "sinister black

arts" to bring a plague of rats down upon her nasty boss. Of course, she gets hers in the end...

Issue #6 features another Powell slime-creature classic: Bob Powell regularly recycled a plot device involving hideous protoplasmic blob-type monsters which ooze about absorbing their victims, who always suffer indescribable pain in the process. This particular classic is the unforgettably named *Jelly Death* in which your typically reckless scientist injects a "lifeless blob" with your usual "elixir of life." (How these comic book men of science ever reach middle age with their unorthodox and rash research methods is a greater mystery to me than where they found these protoplasmic blobs into which they inject their elixirs!) Do I have to tell you that the scientist loses control of his creation and ends up the final victim of the same? Didn't think so...

Chamber of Chills #7 may well rate as one of the most "unsettling" Harvey horror comics. The cover features bondage and torture while the stories inside are unusually weird. Powell's *Pit of the Damned!* contains fairly graphic scenes of hellish torture. *Crawling Death* (artist unknown) pits a group of boaters against giant crabs. In one especially revolting scene, one man is inexplicably transformed into a "monster crab" and then devours the corpse of his wife, who was slain by one of the original crab creatures. In *The Seal of Satan*, a gambler sells his soul to the devil, and when he attempts to renege, he's turned in to Satan by his own girl friend. Quite disquieting stuff, I must say... Moving on to **issue #8** doesn't settle my stomach very much at all with a story whose title, *Headless Horror!*, says it all!

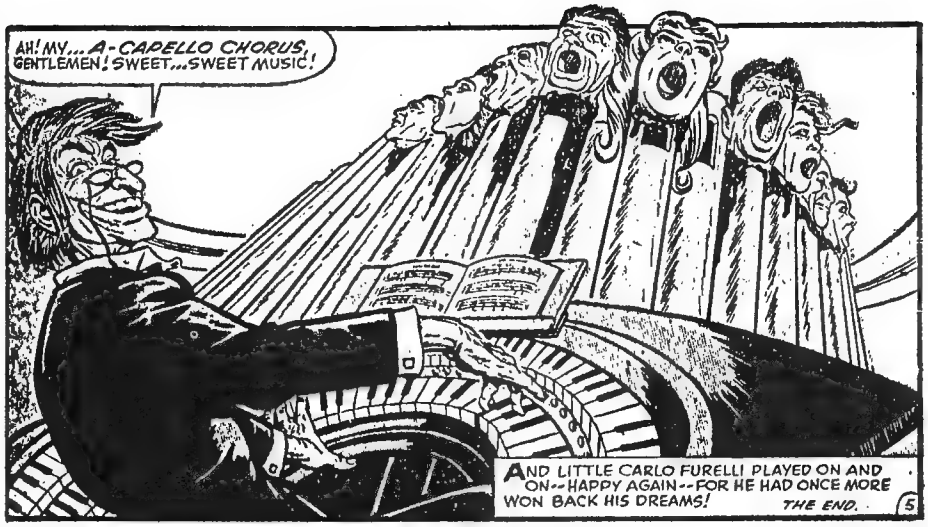
Removable heads appear to be standard attire in *Headless Horror!*, from Chamber of Chills #8.

This level of horror could not be maintained, however, and the next four issues are not remarkable for being particularly gruesome or particularly interesting. The pace picks up with **Chamber of Chills #13**, however. Powell's *Man in the Hood!* offers more decapitated heads and headless but animated bodies than I think I've ever seen in a *Pre-Code Horror* comic. *The Man-Germ*, Nostrand's very *first* effort for Harvey, features an explorer who ends up as a germ in the circulatory system of a giant idol statue. (This story was reprinted in **Tomb of Terror #15**). *The Things!*, a title which must have taken some writer many milliseconds to conjure up demonstrates the impact that popular culture has on comic writers. The story will be familiar to any fan of *Pre-Code Horror* as well as classic movies: Egotistical great white jungle explorer gets his just desserts when he confronts the awesome power of nature in the form of marauding fire ants. The story was told in various forms in many different comics from this era. Can you name the hit film of the 1950's which spawned all these imitations? (Okay, *okay*, we'll tell ya: it's *The Naked Jungle* starring Charlton Heston.)

The best part of the **Chamber of Chills** run begins with **#16**; every issue from this one forward contains work by Powell and/or Nostrand. **Issue #16** has a story, *Cycle of Horror*, which exemplifies another very common plot in *Pre-Code Horror:* the guy who repeatedly undergoes the same traumatic experience only to end up discovering that he's in hell. In this one, a murderer on the lam keeps renting rooms in flophouses only to find the rapidly degenerating corpse of his victim always got there first! This issue shows the publisher's occasional coyness with its cover art: the cover shows the dead man's foot with a couple of rats next to it; on the opening splash page, the rats have been gnawing on the foot. Ugh! *Amnesia!* in **issue #17** is an example of another standard plot: a person loses his memory only to discover, after several pages of trials and tribulations, that he's the devil! *The Collector* is a nifty tale about Thaddeus Stevens, a

One of Harvey's more gruesome offerings is *Crawling Death* from **CoC #7.**

jaded big game hunter who's shot every animal there is. He finds a magic pool in the jungle which creates exotic duplicates of any creature ill-fated enough to stumble into its waters. *Aha!*, thinks Thaddeus. Now he can shoot animals which no other hunter has ever seen. Behaving in the appropriate manner of a great white hunter, he starts driving animals into the pool and killing all the bizarre copies which emerge. It's almost needless to say that he ends up falling into the pool himself and his own bizarre duplicate shares his fetish for mounted heads. Thaddeus ends up on the wall of his doppelganger's hunting lodge! Hey, I didn't say it was the greatest story in the world; but it's a refreshing change from the formula plots with which Harvey horror comics were stocked in this period.



Powell's *The Choir Master* **(CoC #21)** is about a musician with very *fussy* equipment requirements.

Chamber of Chills #19 is a nice example of how good these Powell/Nostrand issues can be. *Happy Anniversary!*, by Powell, shows what can happen to a two-timing gigolo who marries a rich woman just for her dough and the jilts her. The irony here is that the story implies that the gigolo left because the rich woman's looks faded with age. But Powell draws women so well that even this supposedly "older" woman looks great! In Nostrand's *Terror Vision*, two "tv specialists" decide to enter a contest offering $10,000 for the first color television. (Remember, this is 1953!) The set they build "a few weeks later" ends up being a conduit to the fourth dimension, whose inhabitants suffer from the obsessions which plagues creatures of all other worlds: conquest of the Earth! A nice twist at the end is that when the two buddies are forced by Krait (a 4-D being) to build another set (presumably, one which can reverse the direction of travel), the new set ends up being a conduit to... you guessed it, the fifth dimension, whose beings harbor similarly aggressive impulses! Not only is this story nicely constructed but its fascination with color TV causes the modern reader, blessed as he is with access to a hundred cable channels most of them broadcasting round the clock in "living color", to reflect on an era long gone.

Thise wife can't accept that her marriage is... er—*over*—in *Happy Anniversary!*, from **Chamber of Chills #19.**

Chamber of Chills #22 begins the "coup d'etat" which, as a result, assigns "the supernatural" as the operative subject matter for this title. Let's stress again for the record here that these assignments were quite arbitrary and I see little evidence that the editors and writers went to great pains to produce stories consistent with the purported genres. The title which most consistently kept within its "boundaries" was **Tomb of Terror**, assigned the most easily delineated topic—science fiction.

Ironically, up to this point **Chamber of Chills** had been moving more in the direction of *real-life* horror. In fact, the editorial in **issue #21** specifically hypes stories "*molded with the hard core of realism and ending with a punch that only real life can sock home!*" Powell's *The Choir Master* is a tale about a maniacal musician who constructs a unique organ employing the using the heads of his enemies. Gruesome, but hardly a tale from the beyond!

Indeed, **Chamber of Chills #24,** the last original issue of the series, contains not a single story which technically meets the title's "requirements." Powell's *Grave's End* is about a murderer who falls into a catacomb and drowns. Nostrand's *I, Vampire*, is a neat little story about blood banks for the undead (com-

plete with hemoglobin on tap); a plot which we've seen from several other publishers and one whose tongue-in-check narration better suits **Witches Tales** "humor-in-a-jugular vein" style. The last two tales in this issue are straight crime stories. Incidentally, in my experience, this is the scarcest Harvey horror comic. My own copy is a rag which I bought in Ohio eight years ago (complete with the famous "Bonnet" store stamp on the cover.) I have yet to be able to upgrade it. I've never seen a Harvey warehouse copy offered for sale of this number. PAID ADVERTISEMENT: I'll pay 50% over guide for the first VG or better copy I'm offered of this issue.

Chamber of Chills #25 reprints #5; **issue #26** reprints #9. The title is then renamed **Chamber of Clues** and becomes a Kerry Drake reprint title for two more installments.

Black Cat Mystery

Harvey's third horror title arose from the fortuitous circumstance that a super-heroine's name could be adapted to that of a horror comic by simply adding "Mystery." As mentioned earlier, **Black Cat "Mystery" #29,** which appeared at the same time as the inaugural issue of **Chamber of Chills,** is not really a horror comic. "Mystery" appears in small letters on the cover and not at all in the indicia. The *Salem Witch* who threatens Linda Turner (Hollywood starlet turned costumed crime-fighter) on the cover and first story is a witch in name only; in fact, she's a crook. "Mystery" appears prominently in both the logo and indicia of #30 and the Black Cat herself is found only on the cover and as the editorial speaker who introduces *"a NEW high in mystery and horror"* for *"lovers of terror-packed, weird and exciting adventure."* She'll remain among the missing for the rest of **Black Cat Mystery's** history.

Having gotten a late start, **BCM's** early run is generally free of the bondage/torture covers which dominated the early covers of its two older sister titles. The one exception is **issue #32** offering a bound woman suspended over a pit while being pestered by some really strange creatures. This issue also contains TWO Rudy Palais tales: a veritable feast of the fantastic! *His Arms of Doom* is yet another mad scientist who creatures an octopus/human hybrid in order to (surprise!) answer the jeers of his critics with... death! Do I have to tell you who the octiman ends up killing?

One of Rudy Palais' two stories in **Black Cat Mystery #32** is *His Arms of Doom,* a monster tale of monstrous proportions!

Some classic Powell faces—*Rotting Demons,* from **Black Cat Mystery #36.** (Notice how his art can sometimes be mistaken for Frazetta by novices.)

Jack of Horror in **Black Cat Mystery #34** is a Bob Powell tour de force. A gambler makes a deal with a witch to recoup his losses. The penalty he must pay is to lead the Jack, Queen and King *("the figures on the cards!")* on a rampage of death! Regaining his conscience, he refuses and is subjected to supernatural fire as the penalty. The panels where the flames leap about and ultimately consume the gambler are quite impressive: unfortunately, red doesn't reproduce well in black-and-white so we can't provide a sample.

Powell again demonstrates his knack with fire in **BCM #36's** *Rotting Demons.* This story also shows the artist's superb ability at rendering the human face—both normal and monstrous! **Issue #39** offers *The Body Maker* by Lee Elias. This odd little number tells us about an ugly hunchback who decides to create his own bride à la Frankenstein. It's never explained to the reader why, if no normal human female can stand to look at him, a female created out of the parts of—well, normal human females—will be any more able to. The hunchback goes around collecting his parts and is just about to animate his beloved when he discovers that the beautiful blonde head has *black* roots. Desiring perfection, he suffers the classic fate of the compulsive and is destroyed in the quest for the *perfect* blonde!

Howard Nostrand's first appearance in **Black Cat Mystery** is *Search for Evil* in **issue #44.** This story is notable as yet another variation on the "see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil." Other than that, it's interesting for a character who looks an awful lot like EC's **Crypt-Keeper.**

Black Cat Mystery #45 contains Powell's near-legendary story, *Colorama,* which deserves some detailed discussion. This tale is notorious for its psychedelic nature and its wild use of color. The plot, told in the second person (a difficult writing style rarely-used in comics: EC being far and away the publisher to make the most use of it) is easily summarized. The lead character is never identified or seen. In fact, he is the reader ("YOU") and all the panels are drawn from the reader's point of view. "You" experience psychedelic delusions when viewing

A hunchback constructs a woman who will love him—*from scratch*—in Lee Elias's *The Body Maker.*

objects of intense color. A street light, for example, changes from a red sphere to an immense amoeba-like blob. An optometrist's conclusion is that you suffer from "hypersensitivity" to light. He has a pair of corrective glasses which work, but they require an adjustment which will require time. But you can't stand the hallucinations which you're experiencing without them so you return and strangle the poor eye doctor. The stolen glasses work fine... for a little while. But the flaw they contain is a fatal one: progressively all colors are washed out of your field of vision until all you see is... *black.*

Apparently, "you" have gone completely blind because of the stolen spectacles. Serves you right for murdering the doc. The story isn't clear if the blindness is permanent or just a problem while wearing the lenses. And who cares?! The plot isn't really what's interesting about *Colorama.* It's the point of view; the experimental nature of the story-telling; the direct involvement of a reader whose presence is usually assumed but otherwise completely ignored by 1950's comic publishers (with the major exception of EC.) Bob Powell did quite a bit of this kind of experimentation and this is another reason why he's an artist whose work you *really* should check out. While we don't have the room here to go too deeply into this subject, let me discuss a couple of other neat examples. In **Joe Palooka #15,** Powell draws an entire story where the panels of each page are formed to construct that page's number in the story. In **True Sport Picture Stories, Volume 4#2,** a hayseed baseball player falls for a voluptuous starlet with the wild name VYVIAN DOHEAVEE. Powell's twisted sense of humor is evidenced by the appearance of her initials woven onto her blouse. These appear prominently in several panels and the real joke is how this stunt ever got pass the comic's editor.

Powell's *Disc Jockey* in **BCM #46** is yet another twist on the Orson Welles Martian invasion story: in this case, the Martians themselves get fed up with the joke! The influence of popular media becomes quite apparent in **Black Cat Mystery** around this time. **Issue #47** features *Low Noon,* a forgettable spoof of the Gary Cooper classic, and *Regent 3-,* a take-off on Barbara Stanwyck's film *Sorry, Wrong Number.* Hate to say that neither one is as good as the film! With the next issue, occasional horrific adaptations of currently popular movies became a policy as "The Silver Scream" presented *Les Miserables* here and *The Three Musketeers* in the following issue. (Turning thousand-page books into five-page comic stories was quite a challenge, no doubt!) Powell's *River of Blood* in **Black Cat Mystery #48** relates the sad life of Henri Fabret, a strange character who is fascinated with... blood. Unable to satisfy his obsession on the battlefield, in the boxing ring or by murder, he ends up becoming a guillotinist.

His wife's obsession with *cleanliness* plagues Abner Williams in **Black Cat Mystery #49.** Missus Williams spends so much time in the bathroom that Alvin has to resort to extreme measures to convince her that she's... *Clean As A Whistle!* What's also interesting about this issue is that while this tale is promoted on the cover (*"They found HIM as clean as a whistle"*), the cover scene has absolutely nothing to do with it: in fact, the Elias artwork evokes Poe's *The Pit and the Pendulum.* ("Some day", I'm going to count the number of times this famous tale has been adapted in comic book form.) Harvey appears to have followed the standard practice of the time of farming the covers out to different artists who, working with only a story title, did their best to produce a scene which "grabbed" the reader as well as having some resemblance to the related story. *Missed* the boat on this one...

Black Cat Mystery #50's cover is one of the most extreme the company ever ran. The story, *White Heat!* is about an atomic plant worker who steals a bar of uranium to sell to a foreign power in order to pay for his wife's medical treatment. He gets arrested as a traitor but that's the least of his trouble: it turns out that the doctor needed the uranium to treat the wife and she died without it! This story shows American culture's obsession with the nuclear and communist menaces. It also shows the woeful scientific background of the average American: radium was used to treat cancer, not uranium; in fact, the cover art shows a man's face disintegrating from contact with... radium.

The last two issues of **Black Cat Mystery** are all reprints: **Issue #52** reprints **#34** and **#53** reprints **#35.** **Issue #53** is effectively the final issue of the *Pre-Code Horror* title under discussion here. The series continued in one form or another on an intermittent schedule with both Black Cat superhero stories and horror/mystery tales (some of them reprints—fre

Martians express their opinion of Earthly radio programming in Powell's *Disc Jockey,* from **BCM #46.**

Abner Williams helps his wife satisfy her obsession with cleanliness in *Clean As A Whistle!*

quently edited with a heavy hand to conform to the *Comics Code)* through **issue #65,** dated April 1963. The variation in subject matter can be seen in the erratic title changes during this period: BC Western Mystery #54; BC Western #55-56; BC Mystery #57; BC Mystic #58-59; (featuring art by Jack Kirby); BC Mystic #60-62 (with bowdlerized reprints of Pre-Code stories); Black Cat #63-65 (giants reprinting old Black Cat stories.) All these comics are Post-Code and not of any further interest to *Terrology*.

Tomb of Terror

Tomb of Terror is the *baby* of the bunch; the title came into being last and had the shortest run. This title is eminently collectible. Beginning more than a year after its sister, **Tomb of Terror** had little of the usual "growing pain" mediocrity which tends to afflict *Pre-Code Horror* comics born before 1952. Every issue except #4 has art by some combination of Powell, Palais and/or Nostrand. (And that issue is noteworthy for a "heart ripped out" story, as Overstreet remarks.)

The opening editorial hype reads as follows: "*Tomb of Terror will bring you chills and thrills comparable to Frankenstein's monster, the Mummy, the Wolf-man, the Zombie, Dracula and The Thing.*" The emphasis here seems to be on monsters and this form of horror does seem to predominate in the early issues. "The Quagmire Beast", "The Thing from the Center of the Earth", animated puppets and blood-thirst zombies appear in the first three issues. **ToT's** dedication to science fiction, announced with the "coup d'etat" is presaged only by one sci-fi story in **issue #1.**

More interesting is Powell's *Cavern of the Doomed* in **Tomb of Terror #3,** in which Countess Aurora Karine sells her soul to the devil in return for power over men. It always mystifies me why a Powell story isn't always the lead feature in these comics. Particularly when Powell's work is hard-and-shoulders above every other artist in the comic.

One of these other nameless artisans produced *Graveyard Monsters!* in **issue #4,** a graphic tale about men who return from their graves minus the body parts which were taken to create a quasi-Frankenstein's monster. Powell returns with *The Rat Man* in **ToT 5,** where a crook on the lam gets his wish and turns into a giant rat to make his getaway. This story has some really wild artwork: in one stretch, a beautiful woman is transformed into an ugly old hag after seeing the "unspeakable horror" of the man-rat tearing apart her boy friend. This issue also contains a sweaty Medusa tale by the sweat-master himself, Rudy Palais.

Science fiction stories start appearing in every issue from this point on. They're mostly of the future-man versus monster variety, but they seem to be more common that in the other titles. **In ToT 7's** *The Eyeless Ones,* a spacecraft departs a wrecked Earth, flying over a destroyed Statue of Liberty, returning its humanoid crew back to their home: Mars. The gimmick here is that during the previous seven pages of story, the humanoids have been exploring an "unknown planet" crawling with monsters. Not a bad tale by comic book science fiction standards. Even your average EC **Weird Science** story didn't aspire to much more in the way of twist ending.

Howard Nostrand's initial effort in this title is *The Search* in **ToT 8.** This tale reads like a retake of *Man-Germ,* his very first story for Harvey. In *The Search,* a doctor helps a sick convict look for his soul, apparently searching with the criminal, in spiritual form, through the arteries and veins of his body. Deep science, this *ain't!*

Tomb of Terror #10 seems to be the all-vicious-gag issue. Powell's *Big Joke* is about an obnoxious practical joker. He puts a dead rodent in a mousy co-worker's sandwich—and that's one of his milder pranks—and teases the guy mercilessly about having "no brains." Well, the laughs on him after the victim, who's got a weak heart incidentally, *graphically* proves he really does have a brain and turns the joker into a brainless lunatic! The title of Nostrand's story *Noah's Arg-h!* isn't explained until

A classically surreal Powell panel (wish it reproduced better!) from **Tomb of Terror #3's** *Cavern of the Doomed.*

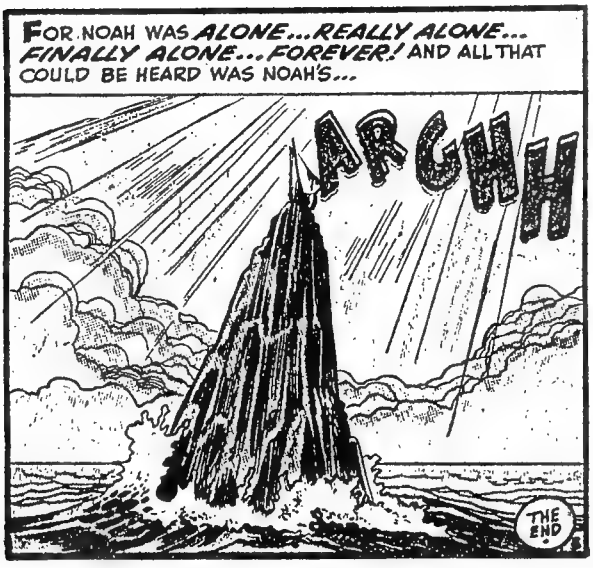
Li'l Tommy reacts too literally to parental assurances in *A Rose Is A Rose* from **ToT #10.**

the very last panel and it's one bad pun! The story *A Rose is A Rose* establishes yet once again the rule that one should never allow anyone displaying obsessive behavior to have access to a sharp axe. Little Tommy gets very upset with his mother's flower-cutting ("I can hear them crying when you try to pluck them!") until she assures him that the flowers find the vases nice and warm and cozy. Well, she's being sarcastic and when poor demented Tommy finds out, well... let's just say he has no sense of humor and tends to take things very literally.

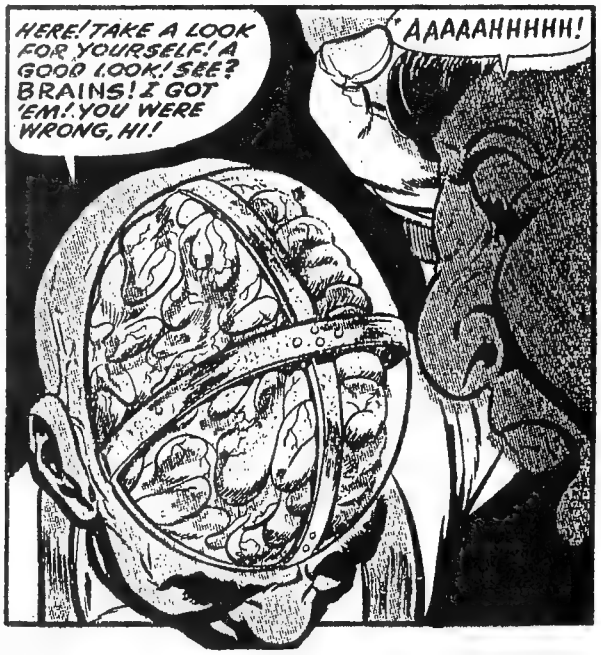
From this point on, every issue of **Tomb of Terror** is worthy of note. Top-heavy with Powell and Nostrand art, these comics offer a great combination of art and story, albeit the plots run on the thin side, with heavy emphasis on visceral shock endings. Nostrand's *The Rift of the Maggis,* in **ToT 11** is a neat spoof of the touching Christmas tale where newlyweds sell their most precious possessions to buy presents for each other. In this twisted version, Felix and Theresa Maggi resent their respective obsessions with a watch and a curling iron. The gifts they buy for each other pack a real *bang!*

Tomb of Terror #13 is promoted on the cover as *"Special Issue! Tales in the World of Tomorrow!"* The "coup d'etat" takes place in the next issue but this one anticipates the change-over to an all-science fiction format with four futuristic stories—none of them all that memorable. Even Powell's effort is surprisingly lackluster for him. **Issue #14** contains a lead story whose plot has been borrowed from a s-f classic—Jules Verne's *War of the Worlds*—where unstoppable alien invaders are felled by the common cold. *The Harder They Fall* is a neat little tale about a futuristic warrior whose 50th opponent in battle-to-the-death is someone he's never fought before: a woman! He falls hard for her and starts making plans to build a happy home. But it turns out that this weak little woman is the sharper of the two "warriors" and she manages to snatch his raygun while he's browsing through *Good Housekeeping 2001* magazines, planning their little lovenest. Who, after all, really *is* the deadlier sex??

Tomb of Terror #15 is notorious for another of Harvey's rare but shockingly extreme covers: this one shows a man's face exploding while a woman looks on in horror. Actually, the tiny cogs and screws flying off are a dead giveaway that the guy's really a robot. Sneaky, *sneaky!* The death knell for this title begins with the next and last original issue: half of **issue #16** is made up of horror stories. In *All Keyed Up...,* an unfaithful



Noah finds himself alone... *really* alone... in a Nostrand story whose titles isn't explained until the final panel.



Joe proves he really does have brains... and makes his boss lose *his,* in **Tomb of Terror #10's** *Big Joke.*

wife and her lover plot to kill her rich old husband and steal his treasure... only to find out it's a huge collection of match books. What a wacky eccentric: that's almost as weird as collecting comics! In Nostrand's *Tag... You're It,* the folks of a small town suspect almost everybody of being the vampire terrorizing the citizenry. Joan and Steve "Everybody" even suspect each other. Well, it turns out they're both wrong: it's Junior whose got a real taste for blood!

TERROR was one of the cover words banned by the Comics Code, so unlike its sisters, **Tomb of Terror** needed a title transplant in order to survive for another two all-reprint installments. **Thrills of Tomorrow #17** reprints Witches Tales #7 and **issue #18** reprints Tomb of Terror #1. So ends the Harvey lineup of *Pre-Code Horror* comics. Hope you enjoyed reading about it!

Joan and Steve that Junior's got a rather severe adjustment problem in *Tag...You're It!,* a great Nostrand story **(ToT 15.)**

ERRATA & TRIVIA

I'm getting some interesting feedback concerning comics I suspect NOT to exist, such as ACE's **HAND OF FATE #26,** mentioned in **TTTTT #6.** At least one letter-writer contends that the comic does exist, but can't claim to have seen it himself. Unfortunately, the only way to prove existence is to display an actual existent copy. Memory is all too fallible to rely upon when dealing with questions of existence! With respect to this specific comic, I forgot to mention that another major clue as to its non-existence is the fact that there are two **Hand of Fate #25's,** dated a month apart. Since these comics came out in the hectic days right before the Comics Code took effect, it's plausible that the publisher simply messed up the numbering, leaving us with two #25's and no #26. This would hardly be the first time it happened: in a reverse analogy, AJAX-FARRELL published two **Strange Fantasy #2's** but no #1.

In any case, herewith let's establish a **WANTED POSTER** for comics which I suspect do NOT exist. If you know the whereabouts of any of these missing four-color publications, then drop me a line and I'll give you the discovery credit, along with the issue of **TTTTT** in which your credit is given. And feel free to write in with other comics of dubious substance. They don't have to be horror comics—as you can see from this list. Perhaps with enough feedback, we can get Overstreet to drop listings for clearly non-existent comics, as he did some years back with Fawcett's **Beware Terror Tales #9-11** and Story's **Dark Mysteries #26-30,** all of which haven't existed for the *longest* time...

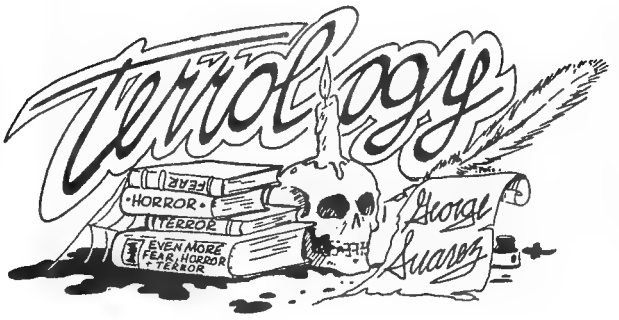
Wanted: Dead or Alive

SUPERIOR	Adventure into Fear #1 (1951)
FOX	Cosmo Cat #6-10 (1947-48)
STORY	Dark Mysteries #25 (1955)
AJAX	The Flame #4 (1955)
STAR	Four-Most #41 (1950)
ACE	Hand of Fate #26 (1955)
GREEN	Liberty Comics #4,5 (1945)
AJAX	Police Thrills #1 (1954)
Conde-Nast	Supersnipe Comics #13 (1944)
ATLAS	Uncanny Tales #57 (1957)

Correction

The St. John listing for *Pre-Code Horror* comics way back in **TTTTT #3** included **All-Picture Adventures #1.** Actually, it should be **issue #2** of that title. #1 is a war comic. *Oops!*

Dad introduces Sonny to the family business in **Witches Tales #24's** aptly-named Nostrand story, *Undertaker.*



Chapter 9: Gillmor

(includes Gilmor, Aragon, Key, Stanmor, Media, Mister, S.P.M., Medal and possibly one or two others)

Mister Mystery #1-19 . . . . . Sep 51-Oct 54
Weird Chills #1-3 . . . . . Jul 54-Nov 54
Weird Mysteries #1-12 . . . . . Oct 52-Sep 54
Weird Tales of the Future (*S) #1-8 Mar 52-Jul 53

Gillmor published 42 horror comics in 4 titles from September 1951 to November 1954.

Gillmor Magazines, Inc. produced some of the most interesting horror comics to come out of the 1950's. While the company's output was not enormous in quantity nor exceptional in quality, it was quite distinctive in terms of style. Furthermore, Gillmor had a higher proportion of stunning covers among its 42 magazines than perhaps any other horror publisher of the era—including even EC!

First, let's get the *name* straight. In previous **Terrology** listings, the company has been identified as **Gilmor** *(one* "L".) Well, the *one*-L version does appear several times in the indicia for various of the company's comics. But the most common occurrence is **Gillmor** *(two* "L"s) and this is how the name appears in the annual statement of ownership required by the post office. So we'll go back to the *two-L* version now and stick to it in future.

Gillmor used a surprisingly large number of corporate names in the process of publishing just four horror titles. (I have settled on Gillmor for purposes of overall classification because the greatest amount of the company's output was credited to this company name.) **Mister Mystery's** indicia show *Mister Publications* and *Media Publications* for the first six issues and then *Aragon Magazines* for the remainder of the run. The three issues of short-lived **Weird Chills** all come from *Key Publications.* **Weird Mysteries'** entire run is credited to *Gillmor* (or Gilmor) *Magazines.* **Weird Tales of the Future's** indicia show either *S.P.M. Publications* or *Aragon Publications.* Some non-horror titles published by Gillmor—both before and after the Comics Code—appear under the *Stanmor* company brand. Gillmor produced short-lived war, western, crime, adventure and romance titles, several of which survived briefly into the *post*-Code era. One of the more interesting was a title called **Action Adventure Comics** which for a brief three-issue run in 1955 managed to tread upon the sacred ground of *two* of DC's most famous trademarks!

"S.P.M." are the initials of Stanley P. Morse, the publisher of all these comics. His name, in abbreviated form, is the root of the Stanmor brand and Gillmor is a combination drawn from Morse and managing editor Raymond Gill. With a couple of exceptions to be discussed shortly, no issue of any Gillmor horror comic bears a company logo on the cover or anywhere inside. What brands them as all part of the same company, beyond obvious similarities in editorial style and commonality of creative talent, are the connections between all these various companies, as determined by study of the ownership statements and the address information in the indicia. While it continues to be a surprising phenomenon to fans of modern comics, Gillmor, like many other *Pre-Code Horror* publishers, made very little effort to promote the company's various publications with house advertising. **Weird Mysteries** and **Mister Mystery** contain brief cross-references in a couple of letter columns but that's it. I'm still not entirely sure why these publishers did not take advantage of such free advertising. The only company logo *EVER* to appear on a *Pre-Code* Gillmor comic is the *Mr. Publications* box which appears only on the 2nd and 3rd issues of **Mister Mystery.** (*"Medal Comics"* appears in a box on a few post-Code war comics.) This corporate name was used during the brief time that Gillmor also published a comic about a wrestling champion known as **Mister Universe. Mister Universe** only lasted five issues in 1951-52 and the powers-that-be at Gillmor probably recognized the futility of identifying the company's entire lineup with a couple of "Misters", only one of which would be likely to survive for more than a few months!

The only hypothesis I've been able to come up with (and it also explains the web of corporate names) is that *Pre-Code Horror* publishers were afraid of public outcry about the suitability of their magazines for the kids who were buying them. Presumably, the publishers reasoned that if a comic book got into trouble because of a story with excessive gore, they could fold that one title (along with its corporation) and the rest of the line would be unaffected. Perhaps EC got into such hot water concerning its line of horror and crime comics because of the company's enormously successful efforts at brand identification of its entire output. EC's competition, with very few exceptions, made very little effort at developing such a strong brand name for their horror and crime comics. While any serious horror fan could recognize, for example, an Atlas horror comic at a glance, a newcomer picking up an assortment of such magazines would have a very difficult time making such identification since much of the time Atlas horror comics did not carry the Atlas logo and cross-references within the comics were few and far between.

TERROLOGY

TERROLOGY is the name of an **Index/Collector's Guide to the Pre-Code Horror Comics** which will be written and published by NEC sometime in the next couple of years. This book will be a in-depth and detailed review of every horror comic published prior to the advent of the *Comics Code* in 1955. *Terrology* will be compiled via direct access to copies of every such comic and will, we hope, include hundreds of full color cover repros as well as representative interior art. This work will be intended as a "scholarly" examination of an important period in the history of the development of the comic book. While accessible by all, *Terrology* will be specifically targeted toward the serious collector/fan of *Pre-Code Horror.* In the meantime, while **TTTTT** comes out periodically, *Terrology* will appear as the title of a column in which I will attempt to provide the comic reader with some basic background info about the fascinating world of 1950's **Pre-Code Horror Comics.**

House ad featuring the short-lived MISTER corporate logo.

Back to Gillmor. The company's flagship title is **Mister Mystery**, which was born first and had the longest run. **Weird Mysteries** may be considered a "younger sister" title. Both magazines had horror hosts: *Mister Mystery*, beyond having his magazine named after him, appears to introduce many stories and communicates with the readership in several letter columns. **Weird Mysteries'** horror host, *The Ghoul Teacher* (an *Old Witch* clone) is not nearly as visible but she does introduce a number of stories in her title.

Weird Chills is somewhat of an anomaly. The title was born in 1954, lasted only three issues, and died along with the two longer-running horror titles in late summer 1954. Since the covers and some of the stories in **Weird Chills** are somewhat more extreme, it may be postulated that **Weird Chills** was part of a Gillmor experiment with more gruesome horror. As the Comics Code was fast approaching, the company's timing was pretty bad. However, the collapse of the horror market came surprisingly fast and it arrived at a time when sales of horror comics were continuing to soar. Keep in mind that EC planned to add **Crypt of Terror** as its fourth horror title right about the time that the public outcry over horror comics led to the collapse of the industry. (The stories intended for **Crypt of Terror #1** ended up appearing in the 46th and last issue of **Tales from the Crypt.**)

Weird Tales of the Future was Gillmor's science fiction title. This is why the title is flagged with "*S" in the listings at the top of this column. Since the beginning of *Terrology*, I have included **WToF** among Gillmor's lineup of horror comics. It may be argued that this is a somewhat irrational decision on my part. While the comic does contain a few straight horror stories, and issue #8's cover is an all-time pure horror classic, the title should probably be classified as science fiction. By the time *Terrology* is published, **Weird Tales of the Future** will probably be relegated to a footnote status in the Gillmor horror section. But we will discuss it in some detail here so readers and collectors will be able to make their own mind up about the title.

In overall terms, Gillmor is one of the most fascinating of *Pre-Code Horror* publishers. With the very notable exceptions of **BASIL WOLVERTON** and **BERNARD BAILY** (the latter of whom I believe did only covers), the company never employed any really remarkable artists. In fact, harsher critics than I may describe some of them as journeymen at best and hacks at worst. But what makes Gillmor so fascinating is that the company unapologetically offered its readers the printed equivalent of "cafeteria horror." Nobody eats in a cafeteria to find gourmet delicacies. What one goes for is good, filling food—plenty of it priced cheap. One wants the food to look good in its packaging and to provide an adequate and filling meal when unwrapped and consumed. That is the "meal" Gillmor provided horror fans. The company invested a disproportionate share of its creative energies in producing some of the most intense and stunning covers ever to appear on horror comics. Many of these have appeared in the *Galleries* of previous issues of **TTTTT** and some of the best appear again in this issue—both in the *Gallery* and on the back cover. The contents "packaged" between these covers may not measure up to the standards set by them, but they usually do fill criteria which we are about to discuss.

Don't look to Gillmor for profound, intense horror shock stories in the EC mold. That's not really the company's style. As you will see in the examples to follow, Gillmor tales are simpler, shorter and much more visceral in their impact. Without doubt, Gillmor writers sometimes attempted to imitate EC's patented "shock ending" approach, but the best Gillmor stories are those which are free of the bounds of formula storytelling. With even the best EC horror stories, an experienced reader is frequently able to guess generally what the nature of the "shocking" conclusion is likely to be. This is because EC's writers, however skilled, used a rather small set of standard devices in narrating their stories. Gillmor's writers, less capable and experienced that EC's, were quite capable of completely ignoring this kind of "logic" in telling a tale. While logic is usually an asset in producing most goods, some of the best horror stories are those which completely defy the limitations of logical thinking. I think you will understand what I mean much better after we discuss Gillmor's output in some detail. So let's get started.

Mister Mystery

The first six issues of **Mister Mystery** were printed in Canada. Apparently as a result, they have an inferior look and feel to them than later issues—this is particularly noticeable in the mediocre coloring. In this sense, they have some similarity to the early issues of Story Comics' **Mysterious Adventures** and **Dark Mysteries**, both of which were also printed in Canada. (We discussed this publisher back in **TTTTT #5.**) The Canadian-printed issues are those published by *Media Publications*. While there is little doubt in my mind that this company was a predecessor to *Aragon Magazines*, and therefore part of the Gillmor "empire", there is a different editorial "feel" to

"*Kurtzmanesque*" art in a story from the third issue of Mister Mystery.

these comics. Consequently, I suspect that somewhere around **Mister Mystery #6** or **#7**, a significant change in creative personnel took place in the Gillmor organization.

Mister Mystery himself is introduced immediately on the cover and the splash page of the first story, *Hand.* He is dressed as a magician and holds a large volume entitled *Eerie Tales* which presumably is the source of the stories which he introduces. Mister Mystery doesn't have nearly the depth of characterization of EC's peerless horror hosts, but he is better developed than a lot of others—for example, the nameless old witch appearing in Harvey's **Witches Tales.** The only noteworthy story in **Mister Mystery #1** is *Television Ghost,* which Overstreet describes as a "Kurtzmanesque" horror story. **The Price Guide** is quite right in this description. However, I strongly doubt this story is by Harvey Kurtzman, who was already hard at work at EC doing science fiction and war comics. The style of art and storytelling is very immitative of Kurtzman's tongue-in-cheek sci-fi work in the early issues of **Weird Science** and **Weird Fantasy.** "Kurtzmanesque" stories also appear in next two issues of **Mister Mystery.** If any reader believes that these stories were actually drawn by Kurtzman, please let me know.

Frankly, the stories in these early issues of **Mister Mystery** tend to be tediously serious and quite dull. Add to that mix the slapdash and ugly coloring job and you've got some pretty mediocre magazines. The "Kurtzmanesque" tale in **issue #3,** *Now I'll Tell One,* is a significant exception. Sandy Beard is an old prospector who hangs around a desert atomic energy plant spinning tall tales. One day while prospecting, he stumbles across an enormous underground cavern full of futuristic equipment. The machinery is owned and operated by giant intelligent ants! The talking insects are capable of transforming themselves into human disguise through the gamma rays obtained from radium. Atomic energy was a fascinating and frightening new subject in the early 1950's and the mass media depicted radium and uranium as incredible wonder elements capable of all kinds of magic. This attitude is reflected repeatedly in this story. Sandy steals some radium and uses the bars conventionally as a hammer to overcome his guards and escape in order to warn the world of the insectoid civilization's plans to conquer mankind. None of the policemen and atomic plant guards believe Sandy's story since he is considered an inveterate liar. However, Sandy still has the radium bars as evidence of his experience. Unfortunately, once exposed to the radioactive element, the cops and guards are transformed back into giant ants and they quickly dispose of the unlucky prospector.

Mister Mystery #3 also contains a rare Gillmor house ad: a full-pager offering mail order subscriptions for both **Mister Mystery** and the aforementioned short-lived wrestling comic **Mister Universe.** The same ad is repeated in issue #4.

The humorous style characteristic of a lot of Gillmor's later output starts to appear in **Mister Mystery #4.** *Button, Button... Who's Got the Button?,* while only four pages long, is a true classic of the Gillmor genre of horror. This story deserves some detailed coverage—my analysis will probably contain more words than the dialogue in the story itself. But it's an excellent demonstration of the point made earlier about how Gillmor's writers, free of slavish addiction to the rules of logic (and good story composition), were completely unpredictable when laying out their stories.

Michael Carter goes nuts trying to find out *Who's Got the Button?*

Button, Button... starts out with Mister Mystery introducing us to Michael Carter, a "talented young axe murderer." Apparently, Michael is a newlywed who has recently dispatched his bride with an axe and finds himself on death row awaiting execution in just two weeks. Noticing that escape is impossible, he plots to

avoid the electric chair by feigning insanity. (This guy killed his new bride with a hatchet. He's already got me halfway convinced that he might be nuts!) After a whole panel's worth of irrational behavior—attacking guards, laughing hysterically and remaining unfazed by high-power water hoses—Michael succeeds in convincing the prison doctor that he *is* insane. The warden, less naive and a bit more experienced with the wiles of criminals, decides to give Carter's mental state the acid-test by putting him in solitary confinement. While in solitary, Carter starts having bad dreams involving his lovely bride and bloody axes. These dreams give him the creeps. Resolved not to lose his mind in actuality, he distracts himself by playing a game with a button off his shirt. He tosses it into the air and recovers it on the ground repeatedly. This goes on for hours. (Sounds like fun, eh?) However, at some point, he throws the button up and it fails to come down. He searches everywhere in the gloomy cell but is unable to find the object of his manic game. At this point, his hallucinations return and he suddenly has a vision of the button appearing on his dead bride's neck—presumably near where he aimed the axe. This causes Carter to crack completely and he is led out of the cell muttering in the traditional style of the true horror comic lunatic. The warden finally concurs with the doctor's opinion, concluding *"Looks like you were right, Doc! Look at him! He'd be better off dead!"* In the last story panel we see that the button had been caught in a spider web. Mister Mystery wraps up the tale with an EC-style punnish moral: *"What always goes up doesn't always come DOWN!"*

Yow, what a tale! Upon first reading, I presumed that it would conclude with Carter's ruse being unveiled and his being led off to the electric chair. I reasoned his visions would be so terrifying that he would start pounding on the door, admitting that he was sane and demanding to be executed. Or that his poor victim would actually return from the grave and either execute him herself or drive him truly insane with fear, with or without benefit of button. These would be classically logical EC-style shock endings. But logic and reason must be tossed to the wind! I never considered that Carter would actually be driven crazy by the loss of the object of his little game. The irony here is that Carter was probably always crazy anyway and the effort at simulating insanity is what actually drove him completely over the edge. Remember, while his motivation is never made clear to us, this guy did kill his new bride with an axe. That's a fairly insane act no matter how you look at it. While trying not to beat this story to death, I must stress that, as horror stories go, this is quintessential Gillmor. If you like this kind of completely off-the-wall storytelling, coupled with somewhat crude but functional artwork, then you'll enjoy the Gillmor line of *Pre-Code Horror* comics.

By **Mister Mystery #5,** signatures start popping up regularly on stories. This issue features two stories and a cover by **TONY MORTELLARO,** a proficient and productive craftsman who drew stories for every Gillmor horror title and several of its non-horror magazines. Some of Gillmor's most graphic covers were drawn by this gentleman. **MM #5** is the most gruesome Gillmor comic to date. Previous stories have tended towards the tame side. In *Carniverous Cargo!,* a party of sailors are sent to find a previous group of seamen who have themselves vanished after searching for the crew of a ship missing in the Florida keys. The seamen find that their compatriots have been partially consumed by some kind of amoeba-like "undersea growth" and they end up in the same hideous circumstances! Mister Mystery, always appreciative of the funny side of horror, note that since each group of searchers gets devoured by the slimy ooze, this *"viscious cycle"* will continue forever... or until *"hell freezes over! Heh... Heh... Heh!"* Another fine example of the unpredictable Gillmor twist ending. (Yeah, also fine examples of Gillmor editing problems: both *carniverous* and *viscious* are spelled here exactly as they appeared in the story. Kudos to you if you caught these misspellings!)

The best part of the run of **Mister Mystery** begins with **issue #7,** the first Gillmor comic to feature Wolverton artwork. Actually, **MM #6** can be included in the best part of the title's run due to its superb Mortellaro cover (which we offered in **TTTTT #5.**) The opening tale in **MM #7** is the all-time classic story *The Brain-Bats of Venus* by one of comicdom's greatest artists, **BASIL WOLVERTON.** This is actually a science fiction story about aliens resembling flying octopi who settle onto the heads of Earthmen visiting Venus and take over their minds with their own *"great mental powers."* Only one crewman, Rod Crenshaw, avoids enslavement and he manages to lock himself into a food storage compartment of the ship. The Brain-Bats want to be transported to Earth for the usual purposes of conquest. As the craft approaches its landing spot on Earth, Rod makes the ultimate sacrifice: he shoots out one of the "conduit lines" causing the ship to lose control and crash. He is thrown clear of the wreckage and even manages to destroy what he thinks are the surviving Brain-Bats with his ray gun. However, he passes out when the wreck explodes. Upon awakening, Rod discovers that his mind is now clouded by strange unfamiliar thoughts. Instead of wishing death and destruction upon the Brain-Bats, he now finds himself actually hoping that some of them have survived the crash. This change of heart is not really so hard to comprehend: the last panel shows that Rod's head is now supporting a controlling Brain-Bat of his very *own!*

Wolverton is such a great artist that his inclusion in a Gillmor comic is really rather jarring. Like finishing a functional meal of hamburgers and fries with an order of chocolate

The Brain-Bat takes over the hero's mind, in this classic tale by the legendary **Basil Wolverton.**

mousse. There are elitist elements among esoteric comic collectors who feel that the only Gillmor comics worth reading are those with Wolverton art. I should not have to inform you that I do not share this opinion. However, Wolverton's great popularity has led to dramatic price increases for the 12 Gillmor comics which contain Wolverton stories. This makes collecting these titles as a pure horror collector a potentially expensive proposition. This can be particularly annoying since, as we will discuss shortly, Gillmor had the habit of reprinting stories regularly between titles, sometimes in altered form. This happened frequently with Wolverton's work, since presumably even back in the 1950's they were recognized as a cut above the ordinary. A horror completist will find himself paying top dollar for two or three different Gillmor comics which contain versions of the same Wolverton story. Such is another of the burdens which must be borne by the *Pre-Code Horror* collector!

Mister Mystery #8 contains another Mortellaro minor masterpiece, entitled simply *Rat-Trap*. Gillmor regularly mined prisons for story material: in *Rat-Trap*, a nameless con finds himself in a primitive cell secured with vertical bars on its sole window. The bars are too close to allow him to squeeze through. However, the con is visited every night by a large rat who manages to snuggle through the bars. The con notices that the bars are being slowly spread apart by the rat's girth. To speed up the process, he starts feeding the rodent some of his food. Time passes and the rat gets fatter and fatter while the con becomes deathly thin from lack of sustenance. After a few weeks, the day of escape becomes imminent since the fat rat is spreading the bars just enough so that the now skeletal convict can squeeze through them. The con plans to make his escape after one last visit by the rat. (Twist ending coming up, folks.) Eagerly accepting one last covered meal tray, the con discovers that the warden has substituted vitamin pills for his daily repast! The guard informs him that the warden was worried about all the weight he has lost and is providing vitamins instead of food "for a couple of days." (Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. Deny food to a starving man—for his own good!) Well, you should see the twist ending coming at this point. The gluttonous and now enormous rat returns but finds no goodies to eat. So being a rat, he eats the convict! What do they say about the best-laid plans of mice and men? If I were to be consigned to a desert island and allowed only one Gillmor horror story... that story might well be *Rat-Trap!*

The rat returns in *Rat-Trap*, an ultimately horrible horror story by Tony Mortellaro.

Issue #9 introduces a **Mister Mystery** letter column. Gillmor was one of the few *Pre-Code Horror* publishers to institute this kind of interaction with the company's readership. In *Mr. Mystery's Morgue*, the horror host engages in the EC-style banter with his publisher, as well as introducing in passing the new companion magazine **Weird Mysteries**, with its own host, The Ghoul Teacher. The three letters which appear are only "snippets" and of no interest here. As you will see shortly, what *IS* interesting about Gillmor letter columns is that the company did not shy away from running very critical comments from readers—some of the *"How come your comics stink so bad compared to EC?!"* variety.

Mister Mystery #11 starts a short run of some of the most stunning covers ever to appear on horror comics. This issue depicts a man's head buried in an ant-hill. In the distance is yet another head: only upon closer examination, the reader notices that this skull has been picked clean by the ants! **Issue #12** has an infamous "injury-to-the-eye" cover while **Mister Mystery #13** bears the gruesome scene of a man's head being pushed under water by a beastly hand. We adapted this as the front cover of **TTTTT #6. MM #11** is most noteworthy for the story *Beauty and the Beast!* This is a redrawn, cut-up and repasted version of Wolverton's *Robot Woman*, which ran intact in **Weird Mysteries #2.** These comics only appeared about six months apart. That's a little close to be reprinting stories—even in slightly altered form!

Gillmor regularly reprinted stories between titles. Usually they are reprinted with very few changes other than coloring on occasion and title somewhat more infrequently. Less frequently, story panels are cut up and rearranged and dialogue reworked so as to create an entirely new story. Tracking down these reworked reprints takes some effort since usually both the titles and the splash pages are completely different—sometimes, even the page count changes! Currently, I have documented at least 20 story reprints of some form or other.

Basil Wolverton's work is so fine that Gillmor performed such "surgery" several times on his stuff—going so far as to cut up and rearrange artwork and dialogue in order to create a "new" story. Actually, quite a bit of effort went into transforming *Robot Woman* into *Beauty and the Beast!* Let's compare the two tales briefly to explain what happened. *Robot Woman* is a five-page all-Wolverton story about Fonzo, a brilliant but ugly scientist who decides to find love by creating his own woman. Unfortunately, she is a bit too loving and he tires of her constant attention. Fonzo pushed her away and she stumbles into a heating unit and is horribly disfigured. But she still loves her Fonzo! The now gruesome gal continues to pester him with her now supremely unwelcome attentions. The scientist staggers away from her and bumps into a rack of chemicals and is killed by "powerful acids." Regular TTTTT readers will notice the similarity between this story and the Comic Media classic *Death Kiss* (by ultimate esoteric artist Rudy Palais, no less!) which was reprinted in **TTTTT #3.** *(Unabashed back issue plug—Ed.)*

Beauty and the Beast! is a SIX-page story (mostly by Wolverton) which tells a tale about a man named Van Shnapier, a dress designer of great skill who ironically is also one of the ugliest men in the world. Like the unfortunate Fonzo, he is a man of great talent who suffers from an affliction which makes it impossible for him to find true love. So just like his scientific spiritual sibling, Van Shnapier decides to build his own beautiful woman! And of course, he also designs lots of beautiful dresses for her to wear. The robot woman adores her Van Shnapier, but the designer is preparing for a big show in Paris and has no time for such lovey-dovey stuff. Irritated by her affectionate persistence, he angrily pushes her away—into a hot steam press. Horribly disfigured (just like Fonzo's metallic lover) she continues to "press" her attentions on the unfortunate designer, who backs away into a rack of acidic dyes. He is horribly burned by the chemicals. But the show must go on! The last page, (definitely *NOT* drawn by Wolverton!) shows the mutilated robot woman carrying the burned corpse of her love onto the rampway of the great Parisian dress exhibition. Needless to say, the critics are suitably aghast at this latest trend in fashion design and they express their displeasure by stampeding away!

The first and last pages of *Beauty and the Beast!* have been completely redrawn by someone other than Wolverton. (The critic stampede is a cut-and-paste job of another Wolverton story.) The panels on the intermediate pages have been cut up and rearranged to fit the plot flow of the new story. Ironically, the second story is actually the better of the two tales. I'm sure there are readers who would consider themselves "gypped" by such a practice. Personally, I found comparing the two stories to be quite fascinating. Without resorting to excessive praise for a practice which, on principle, should *NOT* be encouraged, I must reiterate my earlier comment that producing a new coherent story by such panel rearrangement is actually a creative process of some real difficulty.

Lxnyl the monster may look horrible, but this intelligent alien has been sent to Earth to test the natives' suitability for membership in the family of planets.

Overstreet describes **Mister Mystery #12** as having a "classic injury-to-the-eye cover." I'll say. This closeup shot of a man's bloodshot left eye being approached by the tip of a white-hot poker is hard even to look at for more than a second. This comic also contains *The Monster!*, a science fiction story with one of the most oft-repeated plots in comic history. "The monster" is an emissary from an alien race who lands on Earth and is immediately chased and attacked by legions of terrified humans. The creature spends his entire visit running from various groups of horrified (but quite violent) earthlings. He finally makes it back to his spaceship and blasts off the hostile planet. "Lxnyl", as we discover his name to be, reports back to his crew that the Earth is a planet inhabited by *"a hideous, ugly race of barbaric monsters who sought to destroy me! Earth is NOT yet ready to take its place among the civilized planets!"*

Panel on the left comes from *Robot Woman.* Version on the right appears in *Beauty and the Beast.* Whatta coincidence, *eh?*

An EC-style anti-drug story appears in **Mister Mystery #15.**

Ever the pragmatist, Mister Mystery concludes the story with the comment: *"Uncivilized monsters... well, aren't we?!"* Incidentally, without going into detail, I should note that some observers point out that the monster in this story fits a classic iconic image which has been studied in depth in psychotherapy.

Mister Mystery #13 has a story, *Custom-Made Murder!,* in which the third panel looked very familiar to me. Sure 'nuff, it appears to have been reprinted, with new coloring and dialogue, from the completely unrelated tale, *Warlock,* in **MM #6.** The rest of the story is a rearranged reprinting of *First Come... First Served!"* from **Weird Mysteries #2.** The panel appears as justification for murder: Bill Talbert observing the romantic clinch in the background decides to contract with a mysterious gentleman named "R. Sennic" to terminate his unfaithful spouse. Think about that name for a second. He conveys several thick bundles of bills to Mr. Sennic who fulfills the deal by sending a gift package of TNT to the Missus. However, R. Sennic is more than just a murderer: he's some kind of special force for ultimate justice. Apparently, he has a "file" on Talbert and knows that one of his "habits" is to drive very fast. It is never explained how he does it, but somehow Sennic manages to tamper with Talbert's sedan and the car explodes when it reaches 80 mph. What's good for the goose is good for the gander, I guess. As another example of Gillmor's logically loose style, this one's a bit too devoid of logic for me!

Issue #15 has a rather graphic junkie story, entitled *Living Dead.* Told in the second person, a narrative voice which Gillmor uses almost as often as EC, the story is a simple and moving sermon on the evils of drugs. Clearly imitative of efforts appearing in EC's **Shock** and **Crime Suspenstories** titles, it relates the grim life story of a man hopelessly addicted to the "white powder" which brings with every injection a brief interlude of comfort and power. However, the high wears off quickly and the unnamed junkie ends up killing a pharmacist in his quest for one more fix. This last fix is a bad one since the junkie ends up permanently paralyzed in the classic "living dead" condition. The authorities, not caring much about an apparently overdosed junkie, consign him quickly to a cheap wooden coffin and bury him alive! Doubtlessly, this story must have had a strong impact on young comic fans of the 1950's.

Issue #17 features a rare cover appearance by Mister Mystery, who is standing beside a savage who's about to lop the head off a terrified woman with his machete. A column of decapitated heads appear next to both of them. Ever the comedian, the horror host comments *"Mister Mystery again... advising you not to lose your head over this tale... but watch those close shaves next time! Heh... heh... heh!"* Well, Mr. M is no Seinfeld but he does have a strange knack of seeing humor in even grim situations! Gillmor's *Pre-Code Horror* era is coming to a close about this time and this decline is evident in declining quality of art and story. This comic is chock full of gruesome murders and violent accidents but the artists are so unskilled in depicting these events that they come across more like cartoon violence: not particularly shocking or offensive.

The last two issues of **Mister Mystery** are all reprints, except for the covers. **MM #18** reprints Wolverton's *Robot Woman,* from **Weird Mysteries #2.** The cover illustrates Gillmor's then-current obsession with decapitation. Unlike other publishers with respect to reprints, Gillmor did not usually reprint comics in their *entirety:* while two of the stories in **MM #18** come from **WM #2,** the others originally appeared in **MM #6** and **MM #14.** The same goes for the all-reprint **MM #19,** three of whose tales come from **MM #7** but one is from **MM #8.** This last issue is actually quite scarce: I have only seen two copies in over 20 years of collecting horror comics and neither was in very nice shape.

Weird Mysteries

This "little sister" title was born a year later than **Mister Mystery** and died about the same time. Unlike Mister Mystery, WM's horror host, the *Old Witch*-like Ghoul Teacher appears only on the cover of **issue #1,** but she does introduce a number of stories. Perhaps she was omitted from the other covers in deference to the seniority of EC's female Ghoulunatic.

The cover of **Weird Mysteries #1** is partially derived from the splash page of a Wolverton story in **Weird Tales of the Future #2.** Otherwise, this inaugural installment is rather forgettable: in fact as horror goes, it's half science fiction. Very few *Pre-Code Horror* publishers honored the sharp distinction between horror and science fiction drawn by EC.

By **issue #2, Weird Mysteries** had settled into the horror format which it would maintain for the rest of its run. This comic is most known for the original appearance of Wolverton's *Robot Woman* story which we discussed above. **Weird Mysteries #4** contains another great Wolverton effort: a three-pager entitled *The Man Who Never Smiled.* The story itself, about a miser who turns out to be a vampire, is entirely forgettable: it's the Wolverton artwork which makes it memorable.

The Ghoul Teacher never got the press of her more famous cohort but she's a cutie in her own right... *right?*

The Ghoul Teacher's letter column, boringly named *The Black Board*, is introduced in this issue. The letter excerpts are refreshingly honest: one writer states *"I don't get the point of some of your stories. Am I stupid, or something?"* Another asks *"Why do you call them COMIC BOOKS? There's nothing funny about them?"* A third, somewhat more critical, says simply, *"Why don't you just give up?"* The only complimentary letter in the bunch is effusively so: *"... your WEIRD MYSTERIES is easily the best. The stories are wonderful, the artwork is sensationsal and I think you are a genius. Signed, The Ghoul-Tea..."* Ha ha! At least, the folks at Gillmor didn't take themselves too seriously. *The Witches Tale* in this issue opens with the same panel depicting the couple in a clinch which we've mentioned earlier. Wow, this story involves triple reprinting!

Weird Mysteries gets rolling with **issue #5**, which features not only a stunning cover of a brain being inserted into some kind of Frankenstein monster's head, but also another Wolverton tale, *Swamp Monster*. This story demonstrates that Wolverton's Gillmor work is notable mainly for the quality of the art: the story isn't all that great. In *Swamp Monster*, an escaped convict stumbles into a house in a dismal marsh, only to find himself in the hands of a ghoulish fiend who mysteriously changes him into a snout-nosed beast. The posse catches up to him again and while they don't recognize his new monstrous form, his bestial attitude is a dead giveaway. Making a getaway in the trees, the transformed convict becomes entangled in vines and strangles to death. Not much of a plot, eh? But the artwork is more than sufficiently creepy and frightening!

The Ghoul Teacher's column in **WM #5** is entirely devoted to responding to a missive from a concerned parent who complains:

"Why do you print trash like (Weird Mysteries)? How can you justify lowering yourselves and your readers by offering them the horrible fare that Weird Mysteries provides? Would you not make more money by employing story writers and artists whose work would by its originality and wholesomeness create a demand that you as publishers would be proud to fill?"

Gillmor responds by justifying its magazines as responsive to reader demand and no more harmful than fairy tales like Little Red Riding Hood *("vicious wolf devours an old invalid woman")*, Hansel and Gretel *("wicked witch attempts to roast alive children")* and Snow White *("wicked queen assigns a woodsman to butcher Snow White")*. The editorial response goes on to argue that *"a child who is inclined to delinquency or other types of neurotic behavior does not need comic books to express their tendencies. Comics are no more contributory to a neurotic or psychotic personality than anything else in a child's environment."* It concludes with a solicitation for more reader response. While this isn't the place to go into great detail about the link between crime/horror comics and juvenile delinquency in the early '50s, it is notable that Gillmor went so far as to discuss the issue inside its comic books. Many publishers simply avoided the entire subject and would not bother to respond at all to parental and societal concerns. Unfortunately, the Ghoul Teacher's letter column is discontinued after this issue and no followup discussion with readers ever takes place in **Weird Mysteries** or anywhere else in the Gillmor lineup.

WM #6's *Big Game!* is yet another takeoff on the popular '50s movie *The Naked Jungle* (starring Charlton Heston) wherein the big white plantation master abuses his servants and is humbled only by the menace of the unstoppable African killer ants! This is at least the fourth time I can recall that this film was used as inspirational material for a *Pre-Code Horror* story. (We mentioned it last issue in connection with Harvey's **Chamber of Chills #13.**) I guess comic writers tend also to be movie buffs! The cover of this issue depicts a shrunken head being removed by a magician's gloved hands from a top hat. This is a kind of "veiled" decapitation cover: while the head appears shrunken and has the standard shrunken head sewn lips, the neck, jagged and bloody, trails severed veins and arteries; the whole mess makes for a very unappetizing cover scene. This may well be the most graphic decapitated head cover ever to appear on a *Pre-Code Horror* comic. Remember, upon questioning, EC's Bill Gaines defended a similar scene on a **Crime Suspenstories** cover by stating that "bad taste" would be having the murderer hold the head a bit higher so that the severed neck would show. Apparently, this issue of "taste" did not trouble Gillmor at this point in the company's existence.

As **Weird Mysteries** approaches the end of its relatively brief run, the stories do become more and more graphic and the artwork progressively cruder. No more Wolverton in these issues! **WM #9** contains a horror classic by Gerald Altman called *The Garcon*. This innocent title disguises a rather gruesome story about cannibalism in a restaurant. A nameless couple decide to go out for dinner since the husband can't stand his wife's cooking. But wherever they go, they find endless lines. Finally, one maitre 'd deigns to let them sit at a small table but he warns them that there will be quite a wait. There sure is! While the couple is tortured by the mouth-watering smells of the food being served around them, they keep hearing excuses from the waiter about their own order: *"We're all out of shrimp cocktail"*, *"There's been a little accident in the kitchen"*, *"This sounds ridiculous, but I lost your order... would you mind repeating it?"* Hours later, the waiter finally returns with a full

tray only to find that the desperate couple have made a meal of their own—out of each other! The gruesome climax is heavily diluted by the cartoony art style and the tongue-in-check writing: almost like a Gillmor version of the fairy tales discussed in the Ghoul Teacher's last letter col. Nonetheless, Gillmor has crossed the Rubicon in terms of story content with this tale.

In **Weird Mysteries #10,** this theme is repeated in a story featuring even cruder art, *Trick or Treat.* Pam and Harold love each other and decide to go to a Halloween party dressed as a vampire and a werewolf. The costumes are haunted, however, and the pair satisfy their respective hungers for blood and flesh on each other.

As **issue #12** is all-reprint, The Ghoul Teacher makes her last original appearance in **Weird Mysteries #11,** in a truly horrible story entitled *Cremation!* And this time, when I say "horrible", I mean in terms of quality rather than subject matter. *Cremation!* is about rich old Professor Jorgens and his faithful servant Duroc. Jorgens knows his days are numbered and his last wish is to be cremated and have his ashes stored for eternity in a beautiful solid gold urn. Jorgens adores the yellow metal and has transformed most of his worldly wealth into gold bars. But his greedy nephew Silas has come to stay with him during his waning days. Silas, pretending family affection, wants nothing more than to inherit his uncle's golden treasures, and at first the devoted Duroc cannot understand why Jorgens tolerates him. But the clever old Prof has a plan to avenge himself upon the avaricious nephew. His new will stipulates that upon his death Duroc will embalm his corpse in a special way and then have it burned and the ashes placed in the urn. However, additional instructions direct Silas to scatter his uncle's ashes to the winds. Hmm... that's a curious change... *Wonder why?.* Well, we discover soon enough. Silas returns from his task looking forward eagerly to counting all the gold bullion which he has inherited. But he discovers that Jorgen's faithful lackey had melted all the gold down and used it to embalm his dead boss. The cremation process had combined the gold with Jorgen's ashes and Silas himself had scattered the wealth to the four corners of the Earth! Plus, to add injury to insult, a "radioactive element" had been added to the mix and exposure to this poison kills Silas in the end. I would love to count the ways in which this tale violates the laws of science and the loosest rules of story scripting but space does not permit!

The **12th and last issue** of **Weird Mysteries** is composed entirely of reprints—taken from **MM #8** (two stories, including the unforgettable *Rat-Trap!),* **WM #3,** and **Weird Tales of the Future #6.**

Weird Chills

This short-lived title may have been Gillmor's abortive experiment with more horrendous horror. This is particularly notable in the covers—all three feature especially shocking scenes replete with zombies, bondage and battling monsters. In particular, **WC #2's** cover is especially "chilling" with its depiction of a man trapped in some kind of picture frame while tiny demons attack his eyes and mouth with long nails and pointy sewing needles.

The end of the Fuhrer, as depicted in a semi-biographical Hitler story, *Violence!,* from Weird Chills #1.

Weird Chills #1 includes a reprint of the Wolverton 3-pager *The Man Who Never Smiled,* from **WM #4.** *Violence!* in **issue #2** is an interesting vignette about a mysterious villainous character whose life of crime is progressively described from street fighting to murder and ultimately, civil insurrection. The name of this criminal isn't made clear but the direction of the story becomes quite apparent as Nazi symbols begin to appear in the artwork. *Violence!* concludes with the violent suicide of Adolf Hitler. What's particularly interesting about this Hitler story is that it includes a somewhat cloudy reference to Hitler's niece Geli Raubal, who is described in most history books as having committed suicide in despair over Hitler's obsessive romantic interest in her. Some historians believe that Hitler shot her himself in a rage, or alternately, that his henchmen killed her, with or without his knowledge, in order to eliminate a distracting influence on their leader in his quest for dictatorial control of Germany. Most such *brief* biographies of Hitler do not devote *any* space to Geli Raubal.

All the stories in **Weird Chills #3** are introduced by a green-skinned version of the Ghoul Teacher. However, this horror host remains nameless throughout the comic.

Weird Tales of the Future

As mentioned at the top of this terrology, **Weird Tales of the Future** was Gillmor's contribution to comic book science fiction. I have included it in the Gillmor *Pre-Code Horror* corpus because of occasional horrific elements in these stories. But this classification is quite arguable.

WTF is no more sophisticated than most non-EC comic book science fiction. "Space opera" is a far more descriptive term. The usual scientific fallacies appear regularly: Earthlings survive in space wearing only a bubble helmet; they converse

Wolverton's *Jumpin' Jupiter* meets a funny kind of monster in the humor feature appearing in **WTF #4.**

with extra-terrestrials of the most alien form without any need for translational devices; such aliens are invariably hostile and malignant; typically, they overcome the massive complexities of interstellar travel solely to capture human beings—and usually only for the mundane purpose of supplementing their diet!

By far the most memorable installments of **Weird Tales of the Future** are **issues 2 & 3:** both feature Wolverton covers as well as three Wolverton stories apiece. Fantastic contents like this account for why these are easily the most valuable Gillmor comics ever published. Two of the three stories are straight space opera done in the inimitable Basil Wolverton style. The third is a humor feature about a space-suited nitwit named **JUMPIN' JUPITER.** This **Mad**-style sci-fi parody is composed of a wacky, mindless plot heavily laced with atrocious puns and groaner-quality sight gags. In **issue #2,** Jupiter is enlisted by the Sloopgoop Soup Co. as a salesman to sell soup to the other planets in the solar system. Unfortunately, he finds that marketing soup to aliens is like selling refrigerators on the North Pole: for example, the Venusians have no need since their volcanoes spew out bean, tomato and noodle soup on demand. Jupiter finally makes a huge sale to the "Moon People", only to find that they only want it as a tonic to keep their "prickly hair" down! Jupiter gets his commission in *kind:* 2000 cases of soup. Funny stuff, but at this point we're getting pretty far afield from the proper subject matter of *Terrology.*

The conclusion to a tension-packed escape is no comfort for the poor victim of *Torture,* from **WTF #4.**

While **WTF #4** features another *Jumpin' Jupiter* installment and a nifty but short piece of Wolverton space opera entitled *The Man From The Moon,* three of the five stories in the comic are horror stories, weakly justifying my effort to include this title under *Pre-Code Horror. Torture!* is a troubling story about the victim of medieval torture who after a particularly grueling session, finds his cell door has been left ajar. Desperate to avoid more pain, he exits the cage and during three pages of tension and growing suspense, manages to sneak through a variety of passageways and corridors, barely avoiding passing guards. Pushing on what he takes to be the front door of the prison, he suddenly finds himself back in the torture room, where his tormentors patiently await his return for another session. The man finally cracks and agrees to tell them everything they want to know. Anyone familiar with totalitarian societies which institutionalize torture will recognize this as a classic technique for compelling cooperation.

WTF #4 also begins Gillmor's science fiction letter column, entitled *Out of This World.* The editor's introductory comments make note of the fact that the first four issues of this new title were composed without benefit of reader feedback. Consequently, a combination of science fiction, horror and futuristic humor has been thrown together in an effort to provide a "sampler" for reader response. Gillmor not only solicits mail from comic fans but goes so far as to invite New York readers to drop by their publishing offices on Fifth Avenue to provide "suggestions, criticisms and comments personally"! The column also makes particular note of Basil Wolverton, remarking that he is one of the better-known science fiction artists, as well as the winner of Al Capp's "Lena, the Hyena" contest. Such efforts at personalizing the publisher-reader relationship were very rare in the world of *Pre-Code* comic books.

I've always considered the friendly attitude exhibited by EC to its readership is the biggest reason why so many fans have such fond memories of reading EC comics as youngsters. Gillmor regularly demonstrates in the company's magazines a similar interest in making personal contact with its readers. Unfortunately, none of the Gillmor letter columns last for very long. Either the feedback was demoralizingly sparse or sufficiently negative to discourage its continuance. Consider that in **WTF #6,** a writer lists his favorite stories from **WTF #4** in EC-style order of preference. This writer considers *Torture!* "a waste of space" and comments that "*The only reason I read your crummy book is because of Wolverton. If you ever drop him you lose a reader.*" He concludes with "*All in all, I'd say it wasn't too good an issue.*" The editor responds to this fairly harsh assessment with a surprisingly positive attitude:

"*At least you're honest, Bobby. And an honest comment, even if it knocks us, is better than an untruthful pat on the*

back. Since you have obviously taken an interest in Weird Tales of the Future, would you please drop us a line with any suggestions you might have as to how we can improve the contents."

No matter. The end of the *Pre-Code Horror* world was right around the corner. The last issue of **WTF, issue #8,** is a complete reprint of **Weird Mysteries #1,** improved only by a truly shocking cover. This cover, depicting a hideous man gazing at the heart in the foreground which has been ripped out of the gaping hole in his chest, is one of the most extreme ever to appear on a comic book.

The Comics Code killed all four of the Gillmor horror titles discussed here. But unlike many horror publishers of the mid-1950's, Gillmor survived to publish in the early Code years, albeit with a greatly reduced output. **Prize Mystery** and **Climax!** were Gillmor's brief-lived Code-approved "mystery" titles. Using the same stable of journeymen artists, these comics lasted for 3 and 2 issues respectively during the summer of 1955 with heavily watered-down tales of lukewarm "suspense". Gillmor demonstrated a continuing effort at marketing originality by offering $100 total in prizes for readers who could solve a two-page mystery. Awards of $25 apiece were offered to the first four fans who wrote in with the solution for the comic puzzles. Unfortunately, the solutions were never published, nor was a list of winners.

Several of Gillmor's *non*-horror titles continued into Code-approved incarnations. These include war comics like **Navy Task Force, Battle Attack** and **Battle Fire,** western titles like **Warpath** and **Western Rough Riders;** and the aforementioned **Action Adventure Comics,** with the prominent cover promo blurb "ALL STORIES BRAND NEW!" (Gee, had the fans caught on to Gillmor's reprinting strategy?) In this first depressing year of the Comics Code, none of these comics must have sold very well and Gillmor's existence as a comics publisher terminated by the end of 1955.

Stanley Morse returned as a publisher of black-and-white newsstand magazines in the late '60s under the *Stanley Publications, Inc.* company name. These magazines had titles like **Stark Terror, Chilling Tales of Horror, Shock** and **Ghoul Tales.** Some two dozen magazines were published between 1969 and 1971. Each issue consisted of about 10 horror tales, many reprinted directly from artwork surviving from the *Pre-Code* era. As far as I have discovered, only one Wolverton story was reprinted. Presumably, the cut-and-paste approach to rearranging and reprinting his stuff in the 1950's may have led to the destruction of his original art. Or perhaps, his artwork had been sold or given to collectors like the Wolverton fan who wrote in to **Weird Tales of the Future #6.** But some of the best of Gillmor's *Pre-Code Horror* stuff appears reprinted in these magazines. While they are considerably less expensive than the older color comics, they can be quite difficult to locate. Fans of Gillmor horror are encouraged to keep their eyes open for **Stark Terror** and sister magazines at comic and back issue magazine and book shops.

So ends our coverage of Gillmor. Next issue, we'll tackle two somewhat "related" publishers when we look at **FAWCETT** and **CHARLTON.** See you in two months—and we *mean* it!

ERRATA & TRIVIA

Some corrections and additions to our **WANTED POSTER** for presumably non-existent comics. The latest **Overstreet Price Guide** arrived a few days after **TTTTT #8** went to press. We can now delete the following comics which no longer appear in the pages of this authoritative publication: **Uncanny Tales #57** and **Four-Most #41.** Plus, we're adding **Nightmare #4** which Overstreet lists with (Exist?) as a qualifier. I don't *think* so.

Finally, I've concluded *"Who cares?"* about Fox's **Cosmo Cat #6-10** so I've dropped them from the Wanted Poster. If you *do* care, write and let me know.

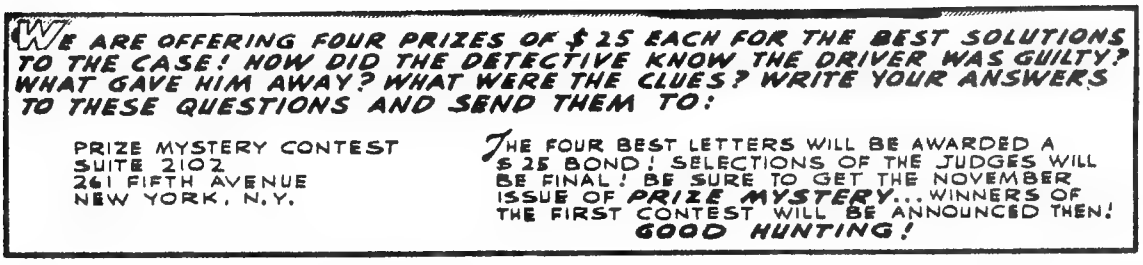
Wanted: Dead or Alive

SUPERIOR	Adventure into Fear #1 (1951)
STORY	Dark Mysteries #25 (1955)
AJAX	The Flame #4 (1955)
ACE	Hand of Fate #26 (1955)
GREEN	Liberty Comics #4,5 (1945)
ST.JOHN	Nightmare #4 (1953)
AJAX	Police Thrills #1 (1954)
Conde-Nast	Supersnipe Comics #13 (1944)

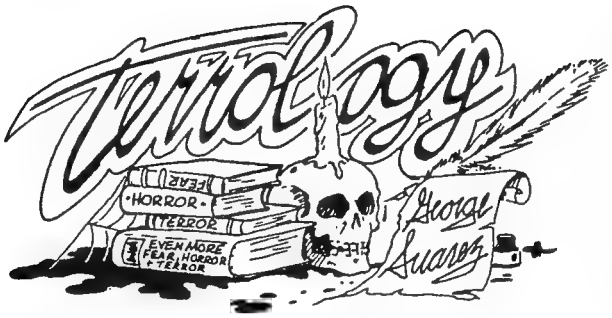
Correction

Last issue, I credited Frenchman Jules Verne with writing *War of the Worlds.* Oops. Actually, 'twas Englishman H.G. Wells. Kudos to David Hall, resident expert on pneumonic plague, who caught this boner. Probably due to my ancestry being French. How's that for a *novel* excuse?

(Get it? Verne and Wells wrote *novels*... Aww, forget about it.)



Aspiring for originality in marketing, Gillmor attempted to keep their *post*-Code suspense comics afloat by offering readers cash prizes for solving mysteries. The strategy failed as they survived for 3 issues at most and all died by the end of 1955.



Chapter 10: Fawcett

Beware! Terror Tales #1-8 . . . . . May 52-Jul 53
Strange Suspense Stories #1-5 . . . Jun 52-Feb 53
Title revived a year later—see Charlton listings.
Unknown World #1 . . . . . Jun 52
Title changes to:
Strange Stories from
Another World #2-5 . . . . . Aug 52-Feb 53
This Magazine is Haunted #1-14 . . Oct 51-Dec 53
Continues as Charlton title #15-21.
Worlds Beyond #1 . . . . . Nov 51
Title changes to:
Worlds of Fear #2-10 . . . . . Jan 52-Jun 53

Fawcett published 42 horror comics in 7 titles from October 1951 to December 1953.

Notes of Correction

(1) Yes, the original plan was to cover Fawcett *AND* Charlton together, since the companies are connected in a way (as you will see below.) However, once I got "into" putting together the Fawcett section, I soon realize that space limitations would not allow both these significant publishers to be handled adequately in one installment of **TERROLOGY.** Accordingly, we will review Fawcett this issue and Charlton in **Terrology #11.**

(2) Our original listing for Fawcett way back in **TTTTT #2** showed **Worlds of Fear #2-9.** *Well,* it should have been #2-10! And none of you Pre-Code fans caught this goof. Well, here it is fixed once and for all!

TERROLOGY

TERROLOGY is the name of an **Index/Collector's Guide to the Pre-Code Horror Comics** which will be written and published by NEC sometime in the next couple of years. This book will be a in-depth and detailed review of every horror comic published prior to the advent of the *Comics Code* in 1955. *Terrology* will be compiled via direct access to copies of every such comic and will, we hope, include hundreds of full color cover repros as well as representative interior art. This work will be intended as a "scholarly" examination of an important period in the history of the development of the comic book. While accessible by all, *Terrology* will be specifically targeted toward the serious collector/fan of *Pre-Code Horror.* In the meantime, while **TTTTT** comes out periodically, *Terrology* will appear as the title of a column in which I will attempt to provide the comic reader with some basic background info about the fascinating world of 1950's **Pre-Code Horror Comics.**

Fawcett & Superman

Fawcett's first horror title was **This Magazine is Haunted,** born in October 1951. A month later, **Worlds Beyond** was published. I don't know why but this title was then changed to **Worlds of Fear** for the remaining eight issues of its run. In 1952 the Fawcett horror lineup expanded to include **Beware! Terror Tales** (May) and **Strange Suspense Stories** (June). Also in June, Fawcett introduced **Unknown World** on to the crowded newsstands of the 1950's. After one issue another unexplained title change took place and the remaining four issues were published under the wordy name **Strange Stories from Another World.**

The rapid expansion of Fawcett's line of *Pre-Code Horror* comics came to a crashing halt in 1953. The similarly-titled **Strange Suspense Stories** and **Strange Stories from Another World** died in February and **Worlds of Fear** was terminated in June. **Beware! Terror Tales** gave up the ghost in July while Fawcett's flagship, **This Magazine is Haunted,** struggled along until its 14th and final issue under the Fawcett banner in December. By January of 1954, the Fawcett lineup of horror comics was just a memory.

So *what* happened? Certainly, the death of Fawcett horror was not simply due to the same cause which extinguished all of the *Pre-Code Horror* world in 1954: the rising public distaste for the unregulated horror comics industry. Fawcett is the only major publisher of such material to close up shop before 1954. (Among publishers of *Pre-Code Horror* comics, only Ziff-Davis and Youthful Magazine shut down earlier and neither company was a comics powerhouse on the scale of Fawcett.)

The death of the Fawcett horror lineup was a corollary of Fawcett's withdrawal from comic publishing in general. The company's big money character had always been **Captain Marvel.** Since his introduction in 1940, **Captain Marvel** and his friends, family and enemies had been the jewels in Fawcett's comics empire. **Captain Marvel Adventures** became so popular that the title supplanted **Superman Comics** in the hearts of comic readers in the 1940's. Demand was so great that the title was converted to a bi-weekly schedule at its peak. "The Big Red Cheese", as this super-hero was affectionately known, also carried Fawcett's Golden Age flagship **Whiz Comics,** and his popularity among comic readers was so strong that even "sidekicks" like **Captain Marvel, Jr.** and **Mary Marvel** supported several very successful super-hero titles of their own.

While all the **Captain Marvel** family titles felt the effect of the decline in reader interest in super-heroes in the early '50s, the entire group managed to survive the first wave of collapse—unlike most of DC's and all of Timely (Marvel)'s super-hero comics. However, the significant drop in sales was impossible to miss and Fawcett's editors experimented with injecting new themes into the company's super-hero lineup. Stories in 1950's issues of **Captain Marvel Adventures** and **Whiz Comics** were heavily laced with science fiction and horror elements which contrasted sharply with the uniquely light-hearted approach to super-hero stories which had fueled Fawcett's success in earlier years. This new approach must have started to pay dividends since by mid-1951 Fawcett moved to add pure horror and war titles to its comics lineup. It became apparent to management that the company would need to adjust to market pressures by

offering comic fans a mix of "old but familiar" and "new and exciting" in its reading material. Perhaps with such a strategy, Fawcett could keep its super-hero titles afloat until fickle fandom returned to its first true love—an approach which worked successfully for DC and eventually, for Marvel (Atlas), too.

Speaking of DC however, we need to discuss here the fact that Fawcett had a much bigger problem than a "disloyal" readership base. As most historically-minded comic fans know, DC sued Fawcett in the 1940's, claiming that **Captain Marvel** was a rip-off of **Superman.** The legal wranglings took many years and involved many thousands of dollars in legal fees on both sides. Space does not allow us to discuss the merits of DC's claim here. What is relevant to **Terrology** is Fawcett's decision in 1953 to settle the case. With super-hero comic sales declining precipitously, Fawcett apparently decided that continuing the legal battles was simply not economically feasible. Consequently, Fawcett cancelled the entire **Captain Marvel** lineup in late 1953. Actually, the decision had been made to get completely out of the comics business, and this led to the termination of Fawcett's *entire* comic book empire. The settlement resulted in DC's acquisition of the rights to **Captain Marvel** and his family. The rights to two horror titles were sold to Charlton Comics.

The Charlton Connection

Charlton picked up **This Magazine is Haunted** without missing a beat. The last Fawcett issue is #14 (Dec 53) while the first Charlton installment is #15 (Mar 54). The continuity for **Strange Suspense Stories** is much more complicated. Fawcett published five issues, the last one, #5, dated Feb 53. Charlton took over the title starting with issue #16 in Jan 54. Why the discontinuity in numbering? Well, what Charlton actually did in early 1953 is to rename a crime comic, **Lawbreakers** (which had already run for 9 issues), to **Lawbreakers Suspense Stories,** starting with #10 (Jan 53). This crime comic ran through #15 (Nov 53) when it was re-christened **Strange Suspense Stories**, a crime/horror hybrid.

Beyond these title connections, there are very *few* similarities between Fawcett and Charlton as horror publishers. Apparently, Charlton acquired title rights only; the publisher continued to use its own artists and writers and the "flavor" of the titles becomes typically Charlton. Actually, before acquiring **TMiH** and **SSS,** Charlton had been publishing only one horror title, **The Thing!** With the introduction of the two ex-Fawcett titles, Charlton expanded its horror lineup to three comics. However, this only lasted for a few months. All three titles ended with their November 1954 issues. **Strange Suspense Stories** survived for a brief 3-issue post-Code run as the completely unsuspenseful **This is Suspense!** However, while Fawcett would never publish another comic, Charlton lasted for many years right up until the 1980's, producing a variety of Code-approved "esoteric" titles, including long-lived and successful (but generally mediocre) mystery titles—including a revival of **Strange Suspense Stories,** which continued from the end of **This is Suspense** and ran until the late 1960's. A second volume of **This Magazine is Haunted** lasted for five issues in 1957-58. These Code-approved runs are completely different from the titles we will discuss here in **Terrology** and they are quite beyond the scope of our present discussion. Now, let's move on to discuss Fawcett as a publisher of horror comics.

Fawcett Horror Comics

I would like to be able to say that being a "big" publisher, Fawcett was able to publish consistently excellent horror comics. Unfortunately, that would be inaccurate. By *Pre-Code Horror* standards of quality, the company's output should be judged average, or even slightly sub-average. Story plots and artwork are never amateurish, but their quality is frequently just workmanlike. Fawcett suffers from a deadly *seriousness* in its horror titles; the company's writers rarely exploited the magic formula which injects just a little bit of humor into horror and results in a much more readable and enjoyable product. The master of this technique was EC; other publishers like Comic Media, Story, Ajax, Superior and even Charlton used it on occasion.

Technically, Fawcett's biggest problem was with its coloring. The company's colorists frequently resorted to the shortcut technique which I call *"full-body coloring."* This means that complex objects, including human beings, are splashed with one solid color tone. While this approach is appropriate at times, particularly when the object is in shadows or in the background, overuse of this technique produces poorly distinguished, boring artwork. It also betrays a lack of concern about quality. Since Fawcett did *NOT* use this approach in the company's super-hero comics, one has to assume that they had less respect for their esoteric titles. Hey, if they don't care, why should we? As far as **Terrology** is concerned, full-body coloring makes it very difficult for us to reproduce illustrations from the printed page. This is because objects so colored become wholly undifferentiated when photographed in black-and-white tones. Red tones become solid back and the object reproduces as a dark lump. You may see evidence of this problem throughout the Fawcett sample art shown here, although we've done our best to select the most reproducible samples. This problem is one reason why we have not provided a full Fawcett story in this magazine. We were unable to find one which we could reprint adequately.

Fawcett's artists were invariably adequate but most were unexceptional. The company did not allow artists to sign their

Example of *"full-body coloring"*. The guy in the suit is all blue. The whip-master is all green. The slaves are all yellow. The rest of the scene is all red. *Boring!!*

work therefore most of the journeymen are hard to identify. There are some examples of really great horror stories in the company's output and almost all of these are by the immortal **BOB POWELL.** Other artists of note include **GEORGE EVANS, MIKE SEKOWSKY, BERNARD BAILY** and **NORMAN SAUNDERS.** Powell is *always* worth reading; his Fawcett stories run from above-average to truly great; also the coloring is of good quality—apparently Powell had control over this process in his stories. As I flip through these comics my feeling is reinforced that Powell's work is the single *biggest* reason to collect Fawcett horror comics.

George Evans is quite capable; but while his Fawcett work includes a couple of exceptional offerings, his best work in comics occurred after he left Fawcett and joined EC in late 1952. It was at EC that Evans' elaborate devotion to detail appeared, which EC allowed him to demonstrate in EC titles like **Aces High** and the crime and shock titles. Many Fawcett horror comics open with Evans stories and what's remarkable about them is their incredible length: some of them run to 13 pages or more—making these comics some of the few to offer only three stories to readers.

Bernard Baily drew several covers and has some story credits listed in **Overstreet.** (Frankly, I'm not a big enough fan of Baily's to have confirmed these references as of yet. Do Fawcett collectors out there agree?) **Norman Saunders,** famous for his painted Ziff-Davis covers (and for painting the *Mars Attacks!* trading card series from Topps) did produce the notorious painted cover of "the man without eyes surrounded by eyeballs" for the last issue of **Worlds of Fear.**

Most Fawcett horror writers took a very serious approach to their story-telling. If you've read a few issues of **TTTTT,** you should be able to recognize by now that my personal preference in comic book horror lies toward a sardonic, sarcastic, tongue-in-cheek, wink-to-the-reader style. 'Tis true this might betray that my initiation to *Pre-Code Horror* was through EC. But all that does is prove my point: serious horror has to be very well done to be enjoyable. Mediocre or bad horror can still be interesting if an element of humor has been injected into the telling of the tale. Bad horror which further sins by taking itself very seriously makes for grim reading—and by "grim", I refer to the reader's struggle to get through the story. Bill Gaines & Co. knew that there was no way they could produce more than a dozen top-quality horror stories every two months. By taking a facetious approach toward horror story-telling, they distracted the readers from the formula plots and other shortcut devices used by them to meet deadlines and get the job done.

If you have the impression that I'm not entirely enamored of Fawcett *Pre-Code Horror*... well, your inferential abilities are well-honed. In our exploration of the land of Fawcett horror which follows, I will make every effort to point out the most noteworthy landmarks. (Most of them will be Powell stories.)

This Magazine is Haunted

The Fawcett horror flagship came first and lasted the longest: 14 issues over more than two years from October 1951 through December 1953. The title then joined the Charlton stable for another year.

TMiH's entire run is hosted by *Doctor Death,* a top-hatted Dracula clone who drily introduces stories with utterances like *"Through my eyes you shall see horror that defies comprehension and drives men to madness!"* Promises, promises! This dismal character appears on every cover of the title, sometimes in a postage stamp style box; he continues right into the Charlton issues. He also appears at the beginning and usually the end of every story. Fawcett's other horror host (perhaps hostess, as (s)he has quasi-female qualities), *The Mummy,* emcees **Beware! Terror Tales.** The Mummy has a better sense of humor than the dry doctor. The other two Fawcett titles have no hosts and there is absolutely no interaction between these titles except for occasional back cover house ads. (No letter columns anywhere.

The easiest way to recognize George Evans is by the bug-eyed look his characters have when they panic. Since horror characters panic a lot, this is an ideal marker.

The *Green Hands of Terror* go on the attack in this excellent George Evans story in **This Mag is Haunted #2.**

Fawcett's attempt at producing horror comics had a distasteful flavor of half-heartedness.)

George Evans has 13-page lead stories in the first two issues of **This Magazine is Haunted.** By far the better one is *The Green Hands of Terror* in **issue #2.** Slezak and Jenk are a couple of hired killers on the lam who seek shelter in your classic "haunted house." The owner is an elderly scientist who is studying the creation of life. His work being "incomplete", he has only been able to generate "parts" of human beings—and all the parts are green! So the house is crawling with disembodied legs and arms; the latter organs seem bent on strangling any normal people who stumble into their path! The bad guys save the naive chemist from being strangled and he confides his secrets to them, even going so far as to estimate the value of his journals and potions to be "in the millions." Comic book criminals don't need to be told twice! The next time the limey limbs attack, they stay uninvolved and the hapless scientist is gruesomely asphyxiated. (It is never explained why these protoplasmic semi-humans have such murderous impulses. Probably the Frankenstein principle in force: Tamper with mother nature... live to regret it—or *not.)* Well, Slezak and Jenk attempt to escape with their spoils, although how exactly they intend to reap the monetary benefits is not made clear. Reasoning that the disembodied hands and feet are not being directed by any intelligence, they are confident that tough guys like them can make a successful getaway from the spooky mansion. But the scientist had experimented with a head *of sorts,* and it makes a sudden appearance. Through an unnecessarily lengthy series of panels, the criminal duo is recaptured and the green assemblage of body parts "decides" to kill them and burn their bodies in the furnace, where they disposed of the corpse of their aged creator. In struggling out of protoplasmic clutches, Slezak starts a fire and the bad guys manage to escape just as the house burns furiously to the ground. But the worst is yet to come! They are captured by police who respond to the fire alarm. The firemen discover in the ruins "arms and legs and other body parts" and report this to the officers. Slezak's cries that these body parts "weren't from real people" are dismissed as the ramblings of a maniac and, as Doctor Death informs us in the closing panel, "*The ill-fated pair meet a long-deserved fate. Execution at the hands of the law!*"

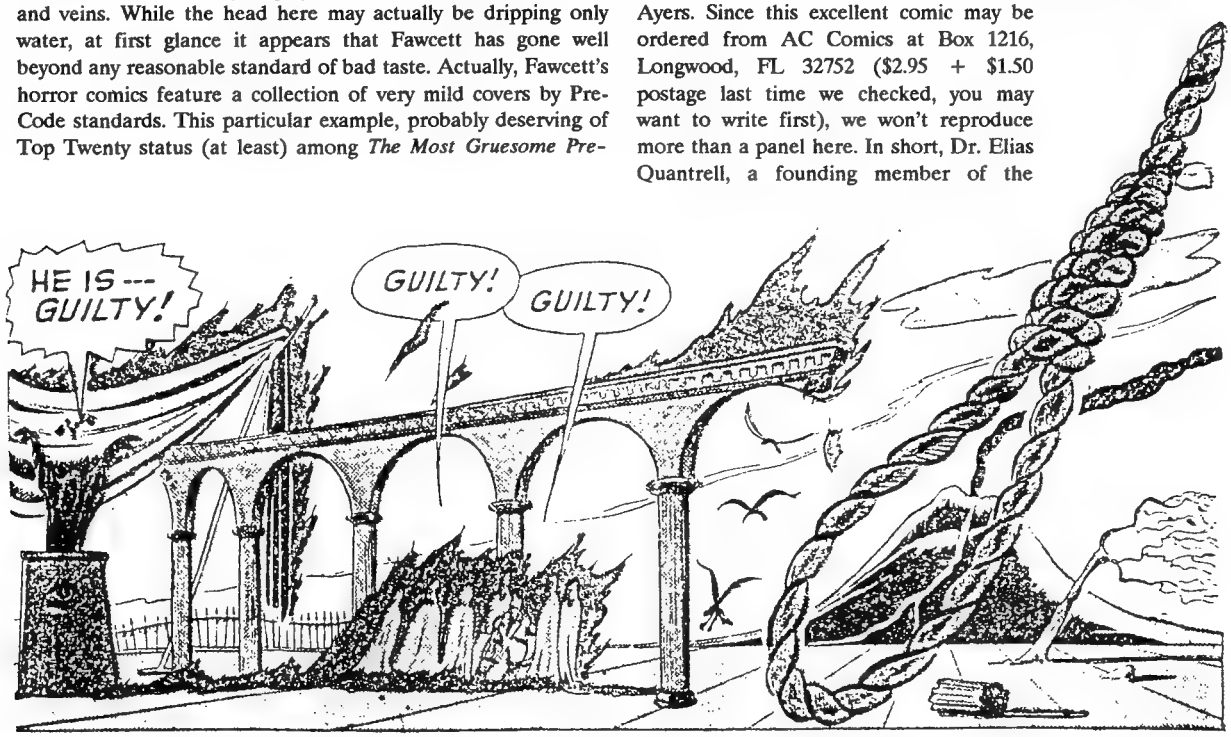
Powell enters the lineup in **TMiH #3.** An excellent story of his, *The Blind, The Doomed... and The Dead!,* appears in **issue #4.** The story is quite simple: "big and beefy" Fleece Barton

owns a carnival and wants to get rid of blind old Jasper Kafacho's unprofitable wax museum concession. The blind man makes very little money from the wax displays, but he amuses himself "innocently" by talking to his beloved wax figures and what's more, he's got a lease. Barton is not a man of patience and in his fury, he strangles the old man. The rest of the story is of retribution. Barton is suddenly immersed in a surreal carnival world of distorted mirrors and hallucinogenic images. In quintessential Powell style he finds himself before the animated corpse of Kafacho, who is prosecuting him in the "court of immortality" in front of a jury made up of wax figures all of people who have been murdered violently! Barton is being judged in Hell and quickly he's found guilty! The last two pages dissolve into a Powellesque vision of Hades as a scarlet world of liquid fire, hangman's nooses and endless burning bridges. Pages like this appear regularly in Powell's work and these are indistinguishable from similar apparitions found in his Harvey stories. These pages alone are worth the "price of admission". This kind of craftsmanship is found nowhere else in *Pre-Code Horror*. Not even EC's skilled crew was capable of producing pages with such imaginative power. Note that this story was reprinted with 3-D effects in Eclipse's **Mr. Monster's 3-D Hi-Octane Horror #1** (1986.) I would have preferred it reprinted in *color!*

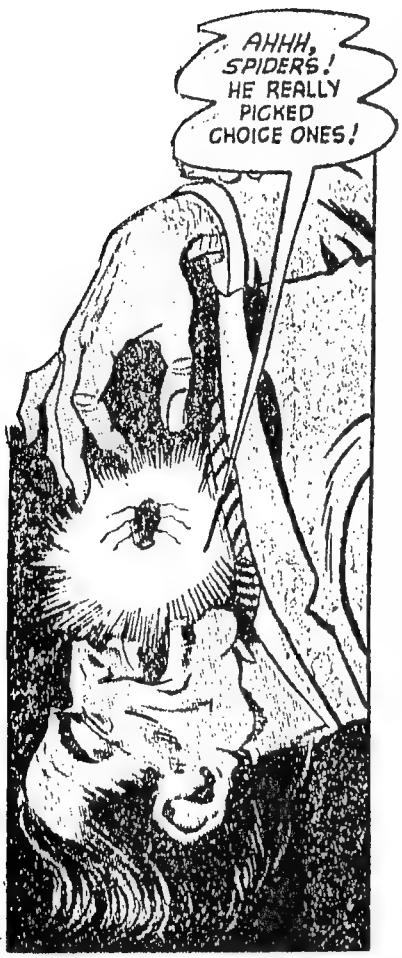
Issue #5 features an excellent 11-page Evans story followed by a nice Powell 9-pager. 'Nuff said. This is the last appearance by Evans in this title; Powell doesn't return until issue #11. Which means that the next few issues constitute something of a valley of mediocrity for this Fawcett title. **Issue #10** is notorious for an extreme decapitation cover which has been reproduced on the back cover. Once again, we have to remark upon how William Gaines received perhaps undeserved flak when asked by a Senate subcommittee where he would draw the line in depicting decapitated heads on a comic book cover. Gaines drew the line of "bad taste" at any display of the neck trailing bloody flesh and veins. While the head here may actually be dripping only water, at first glance it appears that Fawcett has gone well beyond any reasonable standard of bad taste. Actually, Fawcett's horror comics feature a collection of very mild covers by Pre-Code standards. This particular example, probably deserving of Top Twenty status (at least) among *The Most Gruesome Pre-Code Horror Covers,* is distinctly anomalous. Is there a story behind the cover inside this comic?, you ask. Of course not!

Powell returns in **issue #11** but that comic is more noteworthy for the story *And Then What????,* one of the few attempts by Fawcett at humorous horror. Doctor Sebastian, a psychiatrist, is engaged by one Joe Keene who is afflicted with the notion that he is a man-sized bat. Keene sleeps upside down hanging from the ceiling; he carries a box around containing his favorite food: spiders. Sebastian is a shrink with modern notions (by '50s standards). He subjects the bat-man to a series of electro-shock treatments and cures him in record time. As proof of the his recovery, Keene is asked to surrender his box of spiders, like a smoker is required to throw away his last pack. Keene does so proudly and leaves the doctor's office with a smile on his face. Sebastian dismisses his secretary and sits back to contemplate his success. Suddenly, he leaps up and hooks his feet on a curtain rod. Hanging upside down in the air, he opens the box, noisily gulps down a few and sighs: *"Ahhh, spiders! He really picked choice ones!"* Takes one to know one, I guess! Doctor Death appears in the final panel to confide that while spiders may sound nauseating to eat, *"they're really not so bad!"* Frankly, I'll take a wacko short story like this one over some of the tediously long, boring and deadly serious horror tales which appear regularly in Fawcett's titles.

This Magazine is Haunted #12 is known for one of Bob Powell's most famous (and totally insane) horror stories, *The Wall of Flesh!* This particular tale is so notorious that Bill Black's AC Comics recently introduced a horror reprint series entitled **Wall of Flesh** whose entire structure is built around... well, *The Wall of Flesh*—even going so far as having the stories introduced by a horror host known as...well, *The Wall of Flesh!* The first issue (1992) reprinted the story in black-and-white along with horror tales by Joe Kubert, Wally Wood and Dick Ayers. Since this excellent comic may be ordered from AC Comics at Box 1216, Longwood, FL 32752 ($2.95 + $1.50 postage last time we checked, you may want to write first), we won't reproduce more than a panel here. In short, Dr. Elias Quantrell, a founding member of the



A depiction of the eternal fires of hell, by *peerless* Bob Powell. From **This Mag is Haunted #11.**



Dr. Sebastian enjoys an occasional spider snack in **TMiH #11.**

proverbial *College of Mad Scientists,* has created the aforementioned living wall of flesh. *Yes,* one entire wall of a hospital laboratory has been transformed into a living mass of throbbing pink tissue. (The biggest reason to buy the original comic is to see this stuff drawn *in color!)* Apparently the doctor seeks fame as the inventor of the first "flesh bank". But the wall has to *feed!* So the crazy doc entices a young nurse (who, incidentally, has spurned his advances) to visit him and he pushes her into the pulsating wall of ooze. Unfortunately for him, this nurse has a fiancé, a Korean war veteran, who is coming to "take her away" from her career in medicine. The ex-Marine searches everywhere in the hospital; meanwhile, Sheila is progressively being sucked into the fleshy wall. Everything in this story is classically Powell: the wacky storyline, the attractive woman, the hunchback scientist, the handsome hero, the unworldly drawings. Another typical *Powellism* is the inclusion of several panels showing a large clock ticking down the lifetime of the struggling nurse. Sure enough, the hero discovers his beloved just in time to grab her hand (all that remains outside the ooze) and drag her unconscious body out of the protoplasmic mire. The mad scientist attacks him furiously with a scalpel. Surely you can guess the ending: he trips over the soldier and tumbles directly into his creation. "*The open cavity of flesh closed like a starving mouth! There was one last horrifying scream—and then two wildly staring eyeballs! The most terrible eyes any human had ever seen—eyes that were glimpsing the last of life!*" Boy, that Powell! If I haven't said it often enough before—*pay attention:* Bob Powell was one great artist!

The last two issues of this comic book have nothing to remotely approach a story like *The Wall of Flesh!* **Issue #14,** December 1953, is officially Fawcett's *last* horror comic. So let's move on to Fawcett's second-born child of horror...

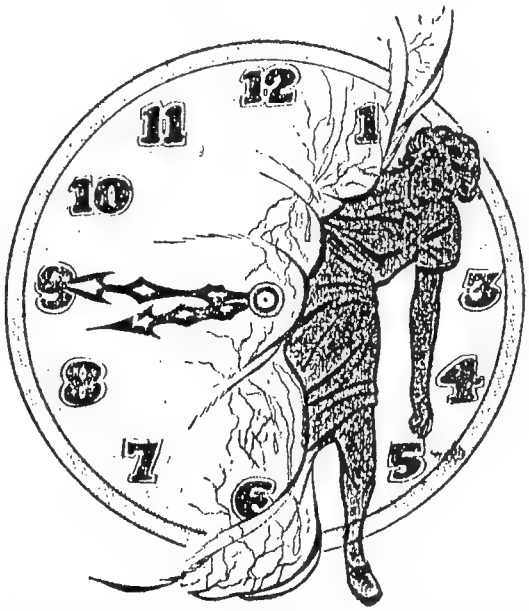
Worlds Beyond/of Fear

Worlds Beyond #1 appeared with the cover date of November 1951. It contains a Powell story, *Twice Alive!* which is very reminiscent of *Man-Germ!,* Howard Nostrand's first effort for Harvey in **Chamber of Chills #13** (Oct 52.) Both stories feature a sick man hallucinating that he is trapped within his own arteries and being chased by supernatural beings. There are no obvious swipes between the two stories but the similarities in story and panel style are startling!

The title is changed to **Worlds of Fear** with **issue #2.** Apparently, this was a last-minute decision since the box above the first story, which should contain a reduced version of the logo, is entirely blank. *Why* was the title changed? Does anybody *know?* I am unaware of any horror comic title which would conflict with **Worlds Beyond** except possibly Ace's **The Beyond.**

Worlds of Fear #3 contains George Evans' best-ever story for Fawcett: a 13-page story with an equally elongated title: *The Metamorphosis of the Gkmloooms.* This wacky tale has been reprinted somewhere but I can't find it at the moment. (A **Terrology "Big Thank You"** to the first reader who reminds me of where.) Archer Commanger is a modern day Houdini who specializes in underwater escapes. He enthralls the crowds with his daring escapades. On one dive, he is captured by one of the Gkmloooms. These weirdly mutated undersea creatures were created by the Hiroshima atomic bomb and they seek <*yawn*> to conquer the air-breathing world. Actually, they intend to transform all normal human beings into beings like themselves by exposing them to "minute atomic explosions" in their bodies. Archer is exposed to the treatment but manages to escape (such is his specialty, after all) and he returns to the surface world. However, the transformation is complete and he is attacked by his fellow men as a monster from the deep. Bowing to the inevitable, he returns to the world of the Gkmloooms and their campaign of conquest begins!

Decent Powell stories appear in **issues #4 & 5** of **Worlds of Fear,** along with a workmanlike effort by **MIKE SEKOWSKY** in **issue #5.** Artwork becomes consistently mediocre after that with nothing particularly noteworthy. The last two installments



Classic Bob Powell art, depicting a clock counting down the remaining minutes for Nurse Sheila, trapped in the *Wall of Flesh!*

A *Gkmlooom* (that's with *THREE* O's) explains his scheme. Another excellent tale by George Evans.

of **Worlds of Fear** are best known for their covers. **Issue #9** features a man's face contorted in agony as he is pushed underwater by an inhuman hand. (Compare it to Gillmor's **Mister Mystery #13**, reproduced in **TTTTT #9**—*shameless back issue plug.)* **Issue #10** is approaching legendary status for its inarguably weird painted cover (painted by **NORM SAUNDERS**) of a man, white spots in place of his missing eyes, surrounded by a swarm of giant bloodshot eyeballs. I have seen at least one ad offering multiples of **Price Guide** for this comic. If you can locate a copy at **Guide** or less... well, I think you should make the purchase.

Regular **Terrology** readers know that many *Pre-Code Horror* comics contain nothing having anything remotely to do with their intriguing covers. Such is NOT the case with **Worlds of Fear #10**. *The Eyes in His Hand* (definitely *NOT* by Saunders!) is a demented and nearly incomprehensible "story" about a poor little boy named Corker who steals the hexed eyes of his evil landlord Mr. Ebber, only to discover that he's swiping what's rightly his since the landlord had stolen the eyes of Corker's father, who was a boxer who once had blinded Ebber in a fair fight, thus motivating Ebber to engage "the occult" to enable him to recover his sight by stealing his opponent's eyes. *Yikes!* I tried to write a cogent and intelligent summary of this story only to realize that it's *impossible!*

Beware! Terror Tales

Beware! Terror Tales came along in May 1952 and ran for eight issues over about a year, concluding with issue #8, July 1953. Note that this comic has been included as **Beware Terror Tales** *(minus* the !) in earlier **Terrology** listings. That error is herewith corrected! **B!TT** may be considered the "sister" title of **This Magazine is Haunted.** Like its big sister, **B!TT** had a horror host, *The Mummy*, who appeared on every cover and introduced all the stories. Frankly, I have no idea who—or what—The Mummy is. Notwithstanding the creature's name, "it" looks like an ugly old woman wearing some kind of hooded overcoat. Well, there are remnants of what appears to be bandages on "its" hands. My best guess is that The Mummy is some kind of mummified old woman.

Issues #1 & 2 both feature rather unimpressive Powell tales. My copy of **issue #3** was formerly the "file copy" of **OTTO O. BINDER**. The autograph on the first story, *The Dry Doom,* takes credit for the writing. Well, I believe it. Binder wrote hundreds of stories for several different publishers during this time. If it wasn't for this comic's file copy status (complete with decaying label on the cover), I would have replaced this raggedy copy years ago!

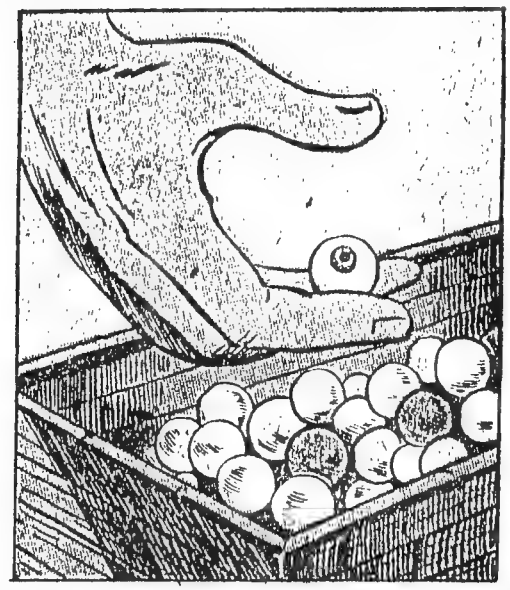
Fawcett's best artists, Powell & Evans (sounds like a rock group, eh?) appear to have stopped working for the company in late 1952; **B!TT** came along rather late and this means that these masters fail to appear in any issue after #2 (exception: a Powell story in the last issue, #8). Frankly, the art inside **B!TT** is *not* great. The best work appears on the covers: the first five are credited by Overstreet to **Bernard Baily,** who drew so many great covers for Gillmor (see last **TTTTT.**) **Issue #8's** cover offers a grotesque scene of witches tending a giant pot in which floats the skeletal remains of a corpse.

The best thing that can be said about **Beware! Terror Tales** is that the comics aren't very expensive. Issues #2-8 list in **Overstreet** at $10 apiece in "good" condition. The covers alone are worth that tariff!

Strange Suspense Stories

As we shall see, the Charlton version of **SSS** is a crime/horror hybrid. During its short run as Fawcett's fourth horror comic, the title does feature more crime- and fewer monster-based horror but the title is still a bona fide horror comic.

Bob Powell art appear in **issues #1 & #4.** Evans has long stories in **issues #2-5.** One of the best to appear in this title is by neither artist, however. *Aieeeeee! The Teeth!,* by an unknown in **issue #2** is a classic of *bad* horror. Stories like this one make



Poor little Corker adds yet another aggie to his marble collection. But this "cat's eye" isn't from any feline: it's from Mr. Ebber, the evil slum lord!

Dentist Gleath finds that his falsies are false with him in the climax of *Aieeeeee! The Teeth!*

it all worthwhile! Menden and Gleath are the only dentists in a small town. Menden is an indestructible bon vivant. He loves food, has a hearty appetite and is engaged to the lovely Lila, whose father is the richest man around. Gleath is an insipid little worm. His digestion is bad, his diet bland and his health fragile. Lover-of-life Menden visits his feeble competitor to have a tooth extracted. While seated in the chair, he brags about his pleasurable lifestyle to the envious Gleath. Since Menden hates pain, Gleath puts him to sleep for the minor surgery. While Menden snores, the jealous Gleath becomes angrier and angrier. Losing all restraint, he decides to extract every tooth in Menden's head! His hated rival will never be able to eat thick steaks again!, the mousey dentist thinks gleefully. Menden wakes up and becomes... well, let's say that he isn't too happy. He chases Gleath down the hall but stumbles down a long staircase and splits his head open at the bottom. The authorities show up and declare the death an unfortunate accident. (No, the cops don't notice or ask about why Menden has had all his teeth extracted.)

Gleath can't get over his good fortune. Not only will he now have all the business in town, the delectable (and rich) Lila is sure to fall into his arms now that the competition is gone. (Dream on, Gleath!) You should recognize by now that Gleath's doom is preordained. Like the egotistical Greek warrior, he commits the fatal sin of hubris. In honor of his "victory", he fabricates a set of false teeth for his dead foe and uses the set as a paperweight. (Okay, okay, this doesn't make much sense but let's allow the writer a little leeway!) Inevitably, the falsies become possessed with the spirit of the dead dentist. When

Bob Powell Fawcett Checklist

Beware! Terror Tales #1,2,8
Strange Suspense Stories #1,4
This Mag is Haunted #3,4,5,11,12
Worlds Beyond #1
Worlds of Fear #2,4,5
One story per comic. Powell drew 14 stories for Fawcett.

Gleath has supper with Lila and her pompous dad, the spirit teeth gnaw away at Gleath's steak while he isn't looking. Other times, they nip him on the arm or hand when he least expects it. Gleath becomes obsessed with these haunted teeth and his life becomes a nightmare. His health deteriorates to the point where he is hospitalized. His own teeth decay so badly that he has to have them all removed and replaced with a complete set of dentures. But after two weeks, his health returns and one of his goals is reached when Lila agrees to marry him.

Gleath returns home to prepare for his coming nuptials. He awakens the next morning and the first thing he does is insert his new false teeth. But Gleath has forgotten about the accursed dentures. His smile in the mirror is tinged with fear and desperation. Those aren't his false teeth! The possessed choppers are firmly implanted in his mouth and rapidly they perform their evil deed. Gleath's lifeless body is found the next day. The coroner's opinion: *"Death by asphyxiation! He choked to death when he swallowed his own dental plate!"* Hmm... Guess we know a town that's ripe for a dental school graduate, eh?

Unknown World/SSfAW

Fawcett's fifth and last horror comic also underwent a title change. After one installment, **Unknown World** became **Strange Stories from Another World.** Fawcett's transgression upon another publisher's trademark is a little more apparent here: Atlas would probably have complained about the title's similarity to its **Journey into Unknown Worlds.**

The only art credit of note in this title is that Norman Saunders painted all five covers. Saunders is certainly a capable artist but I'm not a big fan of painted covers. I think a line-drawn cover by a master is always more effective than the more "muddied" look achieved by Saunders with these horror paint-

Is she—or isn't she? *Female*, that is! Only her creator knows for sure and he ain't talkin'. *The Mummy,* as (s)he first appeared on the cover of **Beware! Terror Tales #1.**

ings. To judge for yourself, check out the covers from this title reprinted in this issue and earlier issues of TTTTT.

What about the *contents* of these five comics? Well, as far as stories go..., well, the covers *ARE* very nice...

So ends our coverage of Fawcett; certainly not the *worst* Pre-Code Horror publisher but far from the *top* of the heap. A one line summary of Fawcett: *nice covers; great Powell art; nice Evans art; lousy coloring; overly serious attitude; casualty of the Superman/Capt. Marvel lawsuit.*

Next issue, we'll take a look at CHARLTON COMICS. Those of you who are familiar with Charlton only from their output in the 1960's and 1970's are in for a surprise. Charlton published some **great** *Pre-Code Horror* comics, as you shall see!

Wanted: Dead or Alive

Yes, we're still looking for "proof" that these comics exist. The best proof would be an *actual* copy. But we'd also be interested in other documentation which might shed light on why these comics are listed in Overstreet or Gerber such as house ads, mentions in letter columns, etc.

SUPERIOR	Adventure into Fear #1 (1951)
STORY	Dark Mysteries #25 (1955)
AJAX	The Flame #4 (1955)
ACE	Hand of Fate #26 (1955)
GREEN	Liberty Comics #4,5 (1945)
ST.JOHN	Nightmare #4 (1953)
AJAX	Police Thrills #1 (1954)
Conde-Nast	Supersnipe Comics #13 (1944)

This house ad for **Beware! Terror Tales** appeared on several back covers of **This Magazine is Haunted.** Note the insertion of the ghastly Gkmloooms for real gruesome effect! As regular readers of **Terrology** know, surprisingly few publishers exploited house advertising in promoting their multiple titles.

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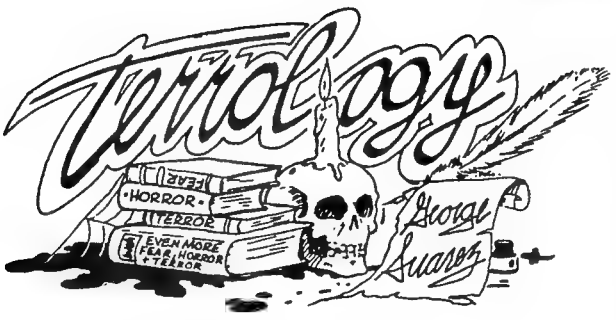


Chapter 11: Charlton

(includes Capitol)

Strange Suspense Stories #16-22 . . . Jan 54-Nov 54
Formerly Lawbreakers SS for #10-15. Changes to:
This is Suspense #23 . . . . . Feb 55
#24-on Code-approved.
The Thing! #1-17 . . . . . Feb 52-Nov 54
This Magazine is Haunted #15-21 . . Mar 54-Nov 54
Title revived from Fawcett run #1-14.

Charlton published 32 horror comics in 4 titles from February 1952 to February 1955.

Charlton Comics started in 1946 with **Marvels of Science,** an unusual comic book containing accounts of "fascinating" true science. Certainly not *typical* comic book fare. **Marvels of Science** presaged a lot about Charlton's future 35 years as some what of a "maverick" comics publisher. Charlton was *different*—for a variety of reasons which we will discuss.

First, it is noteworthy that this long-lived publisher was born during a year in which many mainstream comic companies were collapsing under the pressure of growing reader disinterest in super-heroes. About this time, DC cancelled most of its super-hero titles; Timely/Marvel's implosion was so massive that the company practically vanished from the nation's newsstands for a time.

Charlton survived and grew—very *slowly;* while never becoming a major comics powerhouse, the company did manage to survive for many years by meeting a modest yet still profitable demand among comic readers for stories in non-super-hero genres. One of these was *horror, a* field in which Charlton produced a respectable output of enjoyable comics in the *Pre-Code* era. Before we look at Charlton's four *Pre-Code Horror* titles, let's review briefly the company's background in comics.

TERROLOGY

TERROLOGY is the name of an **Index/Collector's Guide to the Pre-Code Horror Comics** which will be written and published by NEC sometime in the next couple of years. This book will be a in-depth and detailed review of every horror comic published prior to the advent of the *Comics Code* in 1955. *Terrology* will be compiled via direct access to copies of every such comic and will, we hope, include hundreds of full color cover repros as well as representative interior art. This work will be intended as a "scholarly" examination of an important period in the history of the development of the comic book. While accessible by all, *Terrology* will be specifically targeted toward the serious collector/fan of *Pre-Code Horror.* In the meantime, while TTTTT comes out periodically, *Terrology* will appear as the title of a column in which I will attempt to provide the comic reader with some basic background info about the fascinating world of 1950's Pre-Code Horror Comics.

Charlton Comics are Good Comics

So went the blurb which appeared at the bottom of the first page of Charlton's esoteric mix of titles in the 1960's. This collector can remember buying coverless Charltons *3-for-a-dime* at a corner grocery store in East Boston, Massachusetts and feeling that they were only worth picking up when literally *no* coverless Marvels or DC's were to be had at the higher premium of a nickel apiece. Charlton may have dubbed them "good" comics but in my childhood comics world, they were strictly *filler* material.

In the 1960s and 1970s, Charlton was an "also-ran" publisher of comics with a mediocre mix of titles in genres mostly bypassed by the "majors": romance, war, western, auto racing, mystery/suspense, science fiction, etc. Catering to tastes generally abandoned by Marvel and DC was a strategy which allowed Charlton to compete in a business almost completely dominated by the *"Big Two".*

Other factors which accounted for Charlton's longevity involved the company's ownership of a printing plant and its strong relationship with a magazine distribution network. Printers and distributors have great influence over the success or failure of publishing companies. Comics that fail to get onto the nation's newsstands can hardly be expected to sell and a comic company's survival is completely dependent upon such variables, especially in the days before comic stores.

Charlton's output in the '60s to '70s was generally of *fair-to-middling* quality. The company employed mostly journeymen artists (with the big exception of **STEVE DITKO** and some others to be discussed); furthermore, the printing quality was subpar compared to the "majors". Charlton comics always seemed to offer drab unexciting colors printed on slightly substandard paper. But the comics were *distributed* and that's what contributed the most to victory in the newsstands war of this era. Growing up in Boston in 1962, I can remember finding Charltons at tiny, hole-in-the-wall newsstands while seeing very few early Marvels: **X-Men #1** being the only Marvel I was able to acquire in that year. Frankly, I was not thrilled to be spending my scarce dimes on Charltons but after buying all the **Superman** family comics I could find (and an occasional copy of **Justice League, Green Lantern** or **Flash,** when they popped up), my comic book appetite had to be satisfied with *something!*

Ironically, Charlton's quality was actually much *higher* in the *Pre-Code* era. These comics offer bright colors and are printed on stock at least as good as that of the better competing publishers. I suspect that Charlton's involvement in printing/distribution took place sometime after the Comics Code came into being. Charlton was one of only a handful of comic companies to survive the Code—in fact, it was one of the very few to successfully convert a gruesome bunch of horror comics into a line of bland-but-saleworthy mystery, suspense and science fiction titles. With occasional interruptions, Charlton pumped out masses of mediocre magazines with names like **Strange Suspense Stories, Space War, Hot Rods & Racing Cars** and **Romantic Story** until well into the 1970's; some continued intermittently and spastically until 1984. The last two titles ran respectively for *120 and 130 issues* across two decades—which is an eternity in the capricious world of comics. You'd be hard-pressed to find two more obscure titles in the so-called "century club" of comics!

Furthermore, just try to *find* all 250 issues of these two titles. Very few collectors have saved Charlton comics over the years; even fewer dealers have made efforts to acquire them for the few collectors who are interested. It's worthy of note that **Overstreet**

has virtually nothing to say about the entire 120-issue run of **Hot Rods & Racing Cars.** With the exception of usually impressive efforts by Steve Ditko, such is frequently true of Charlton's output in the post-Code era. I have never met a real Charlton completist—as opposed to a Charlton Ditko collector, or a Charlton science fiction fan. (If you're one of this rare breed, drop me a line.) I would imagine the magnitude of the task would be quite *daunting*—the biggest challenge lying in maintaining interest!

But we're getting far afield. The subject matter of this *TERROLOGY* is Charlton's *Pre-Code Horror* lineup; let's take a look starting with the *flagship* title, one of the best comics of the era...

The Thing!

Of **The Thing!** and Charlton's other *Pre-Code Horror* comics, it may truly be said that *"Charlton Comics Are Good Comics"!* **The Thing!**, for reasons about to be discussed, was one of the best *Pre-Code Horror* titles to appear during the horrific years of 1950-1955. It ran for 17 issues and there isn't a real clunker in the bunch; most offer exciting and scary combinations of horror art and story. **The Thing!** accounted for more than half of Charlton's entire *Pre-Code Horror* output and an even higher proportion of the *best* material. Indeed, this flagship may also be considered the only "pure" Charlton horror title; as we discussed last issue, Charlton's other horror comics were purchased from Fawcett when the latter company cancelled its comics lineup early in 1954. Studying **The Thing!** will give us an excellent overview of Charlton's approach to the horror genre; accordingly, we will devote the lion's share of this *Terrology* to **The Thing!**

The Thing! was born in February of 1952. The title itself has a strange genesis: the lead story in **The Thing! #1** is called *The Thing Presents The Creature from Dimension 2-K-31,* by ALBERT TYLER and BOB FORGIONE, a pair of unexceptional artists who drew the covers and complete insides of the first two issues. The "creature" is a typical walking protoplasmic blob brought into our world through the experiments of one Doctor Riko, M.S. (Mad Scientist.) The blob is immediately referred to as "The Thing", an inconsistency with the story's title which the writer never bothers to explain. The Korean War exerts its heavy influence on comics of the era here as the blob makes its first appearance on the battlefield of that war-torn peninsula; American soldiers chase it into enemy territory where the blob is absorbed into a North Korean tank, solid steel apparently the monster's Achilles' heel.

However, "The Thing's" tale doesn't end here; a real rarity in the world of *Pre-Code Horror,* this story is "continued next month." **In issue #2's** *The Creature,* we find that the tank, complete with its imprisoned alien presence, has been shipped to Washington for examination. As the armored vehicle is disassembled, The Thing makes its escape and is chased across the country by the hysterical citizenry. Meanwhile, a mysterious illness has spread across the land: hideous tumors appear on human beings and vegetation grows horribly deformed. The "disease" is caused by a "foreign planet" which has moved into orbit around the Earth. The creature is also affected by the evil influence of the strange asteroid and, transformed into gas, it attacks, destroying both offending object and gaseous monster in the process.

I relate the tale of "The Thing" at length not because it's good science fiction, but because it's an "origin" story of sorts. Very few comic publishers have been able to do science fiction *well*—certainly not Charlton in 1952. The Thing saga is bad science fantasy at its very worst—in that sense, it makes fun reading. However, we still need to be thankful that sci-fi stories are absent from most issues of **The Thing!** since this kind of atrociously bad storytelling can only be absorbed in *small* doses.

The title itself is retained for the rest of the run; vague text references to "The Thing" as some kind of unseen horror host are made in various issues. However, neither the protoplasmic blob nor any other kind of "thing" is every seen "in the flesh". **By issue #12,** when STEVE DITKO's art first appears in the title, the sci-fi origin of The Thing seems to have been forgotten and the name is used as a signature for the unseen emcee who provides EC-style wiseacre introductions in the last few issues.

We've mentioned that Tyler & Forgione drew the first two issues. Their work appears regularly throughout the first 11 issues of the run but vanishes when Ditko comes on board with #12. We should note that these two subsets of the title's run are quite distinct in style and content. In an important sense, one can almost consider them two *different* titles: the first 11 issues consisting of

stories about bloodthirsty killers, downtrodden dames and creepy creatures eminently suited to the gritty, rough-edged Tyler/Forgione style. By issue #12, the title's editorial approach has changed dramatically—no doubt influenced by new artists like Ditko whose style lends themselves to stories with that sharp touch of EC-style sardonic humor.

An excellent example of the earlier "street-level" approach to horror is Tyler's *Mirror, Mirror On My Wall,* the cover story of **The Thing! #3.** James Garth owns an antique shop in San Francisco. But he's also a small-time dope dealer. (In the intro, the contraband is spelled out "D-O-P-E" for the benefit of the naïve.) Hoping to expand his possibilities, Garth acquires an ancient mirror inhabited by a green-skinned, snake-tongued demon. Garth uses the monster to wreak vengeance upon his enemies. However, at just the wrong moment, his clueless assistant sells the mirror to a society dame and replaces it with a powerless lookalike. Disarmed at the worst moment, he is shot down by a rival drug dealer. The story is full of depictions of gruesome killers, dirty streets, grimey docks and other stereotypes of urban decay.

Two *new* artists are introduced in **The Thing! #4:** AL FAGO (who maintained a studio of artists as did Bob Powell and Jerry Iger), and JOHN BELFI—both with styles similar to Tyler & Forgione. The splash page for Fago's lead story, *I Was A Zombie,* appears also on the cover. Charlton used this shortcut technique more frequently than any other *Pre-Code* publisher. (Superior did this on rare occasion. Gilmor may have recycled covers by a cut-and-paste approach, occasionally adding a piece of artwork from an interior panel but the company never resorted to making a splash page do double duty.) Belfi's *Partners in Death* is introduced by a sarcastic Thing "voice" calling itself *"your old bugbear and fellow monstrosity."* Hmm... That's not much of a compliment for the reader!

Overstreet notes that *"Excessive violence, severed heads, injury to eye are common No. 5 on."* He's right. The early issues of **The Thing!** are interesting as "warmups" for what's about to come. **The Thing! #5** features a decapitated walking monster cover and one of the more gruesome horror stories to appear in comics: *(The Thing Presents) Murderer's Row.* Elsa Walton is a lovely young woman who is employed as a ticket-seller at Professor Caglio's new Waxwork Museum. The grand opening is a big success: hundreds of people come to see the incredibly real depictions in such exhibits as "the great murderers of history" and the "chamber of executions". Elsa is properly terrified but she wants to keep the job. At the close of business, she goes to say goodbye; a polite but creepy stranger tells her that the Professor is occupied and offers to give her a ride. The stranger is Dr. Jekyll and in the course of taking her home he turns into Mr. Hyde and slaughters a passerby. Elsa runs off in hysterics... but what's *really* incredible, she returns to work the next day! And like before, her nightly visit to the Professor's office is intercepted by yet another well-mannered but sinister-looking stranger who again offers her to accompany her out the door. Elsa agrees to share a cab with the stranger who turns out to be a temperamental John Wilkes Booth. The assassin is offended by the cab driver and shoots the man down dead—fortunately *after* arriving at Elsa's domicile.

Okay, Elsa must have submitted her resignation by now, *right?* Wrong! She shows up for work once again and is accompanied home by... a *pirate!* Even the phlegmatic Elsa questions the man's attire; the buccaneer reassures her by saying he is going to a costume party. (This girl is none too swift!) Elsa gets home safely but reads in the morning paper that a wealthy socialite was drowned by "a man in a pirate costume!" Finally, she's had it! Returning to

work, she forces her way into Professor Caglio's office, only to find that the old man and his waxy monsters are engaged in an orgy of death! Her boy friend appears to save the day and the wax museum is burned to the ground, allowing for several panels graphically depicting molten monster faces.

DICK GIORDANO makes his first appearance as a Charlton artist in **The Thing! #6.** But the most remarkable story in this comic is by an unknown artist: *Jibaro Madness.* Professor Wayne and his party want to travel down the Orinoco River to discover the secret of shrinking heads. Jungle guide Ralph Harper declines, pointing out the dangers and citing as impressive evidence: *"other scientists have gone up river... and never returned. Some of these shrunken heads look like them."* He'd rather hang around his shack swilling gin. Proudly brandishing the banner of science, Wayne and his small party advance on their own. They encounter a native named Maximo who laces their drinks with a knockout drug *and* the shrinking potion. The party awakens to find itself imprisoned—and only nine inches tall! Apparently, Maximo knows the *real* Jibaro secret of shrinking heads: they shrink the victims first and *then* cut off their craniums! Maximo is also an inventor of sorts and is developing a new kind of guillotine for the bloodthirsty tribe. The professor escapes from the trap, recovers his pistol, and

in concert with his associates, manages to shoot Maximo, who is preoccupied with his experiment. The maniac falls forward just as the blade falls and—*you guessed it*—chops off his own head!

Events now move quickly. Wayne & Co. cut down some giant gourds and carve them into miniature boats. They plan to escape by sailing down the Orinoco. One boat is designated for carrying Maximo's decapitated head—as the professor puts it, *"a charmingly obnoxious souvenir to take along."* Evading the Jibaro by hiding under ferns, they float all the way to Harper's hut. The dissolute guide is drunk as a skunk and his reaction when confronted with the pint-sized party produces a classic line of *Pre-Code Horror* dialogue: *"No! No! No! I've seen full-sized people bring in shrunken heads... but I never saw shrunken people bring in full-sized heads!"* The mad sot bolts, leaving the tiny people in the same room as his pet tarantulas. And the arachnids are *hungry!* The giant spiders devour the tiny humans and they clean all the flesh off Maximo's moldy skull. Sober again, Harper returns with the local authorities whose skepticism about his tale of shrunken people is confirmed by the lack of evidence. So ends *Jibaro Madness,* a tale of true *Pre-Code Horror* insanity!

The Thing! #7's cover is one of the most *gruesome* in comics history: a woman transforms herself into a monstrous snake-headed gorgon and pokes her razor-sharp claws into the bloody eyes of a helpless victim. A John Belfi story stands behind this cover: the gorgon is really a college co-ed who mutilates a professor with a roving eye for attractive students. *The Gorgon's Claw* is actually a textbook case of bad writing: at one point the doomed dean decides to kill the spurned student; he plots to cover his trail by crossing her name out of the student register so *"people will think she simply went away."* Yuh. Good strategy, Prof! This guy's so lame that he walks around campus with lipstick kiss marks on his face from his forbidden dalliances with the "student bodies." By the time the gorgon pokes his eyes out it comes as an act of mercy—to the *readers!*

Issue #9 is valued at a premium in **Overstreet** because of its "double-Seduction" status. **Seduction of the Innocent** is a book written by Fredric Wertham, a psychiatrist who argued back in 1953 that comic books were polluting the minds of American children. The book went far toward advancing the creation of the Comics Code. In **Seduction,** Wertham reprinted illustrations from dozens of "offensive" comics and described scenes from hundreds more—usually *not* providing specific source information. **The Thing! #9** has an illo *("Stomping on the face is a form of brutality which modern children learn early.")* and a description of the story *Mardu's Masterpiece,* in which an artist drains blood from a model to mix with his paints. Collecting **Seduction** comics was all the rage a few years ago among "sophisticated" collectors; I don't think it's quite so in vogue today. However, Guide prices of **Seduction** comics remain high since what goes up seems to tend to take a lot longer to come back down. Frankly, *I* wouldn't value this issue at twice an *ordinary* **Thing!** just because of two references in a rather boring book. More interesting is the question: Have all references in **Seduction** been tracked down to the original comics? Per my recollections, there were some entries whose sources have never been identified, despite strenuous research by interested collectors. Suspicions were raised that Wertham had confused scenes in books and magazines with those in comic books; some researchers theorized that some of the descriptions were contrived. Is anyone familiar with the *current* status of **Seduction** research?

Bridgegroom, Come Back! is an interesting Ditko tale, narrated in the first person *by a wedding gown* which avengers the murder of its owner. From **TMIH #18.** Not what you *thought,* eh?

Back to the subject! In **The Thing! #10's** *Into the Fire!,* we find that Charley Burns is a criminal who has been paroled into the custody of Walter Flagg, an undertaker whose specialty is cremation. Charley's a real *klutz:* he breaks everything he touches, including the flame regulator inside the cremation furnace. Flagg's got an important funeral on the agenda and, dialing the phone, he threatens to send the hopeless Burns back to prison. Burns panics and *picking up a handy skull* (yes, it's sitting on a table as if funeral homes routinely keep such objects lying around for decoration!), he clobbers his boss. Reaching this point of no return, Burns decides to cremate old Flagg, hide his ashes with one of the dearly departed customers and retire to the corner saloon for a few beers. (Smart, some Charlton villains *ain't!)* First Burns has to go *inside* the crematorium furnace to fix the faulty regulator. His sweaty effort is met with success and the furnace kicks in nicely. However, disaster strikes! Flagg's propped-up corpse slips from its chair, falling against the furnace door. Burns is trapped inside and as the flames rise higher and higher he struggles unsuccessfully to move the heavy steel. Later, his charred remains are found by the arriving mourners. In the final panel, the corner saloon-keeper appears to inquire why the undertaker had dialed *his* number to report Burns' inadequacies. Apparently, Flagg had only *pretended* to call the authorities, as a means of motivating his hapless helper. Well, it worked—but not the way he intended!

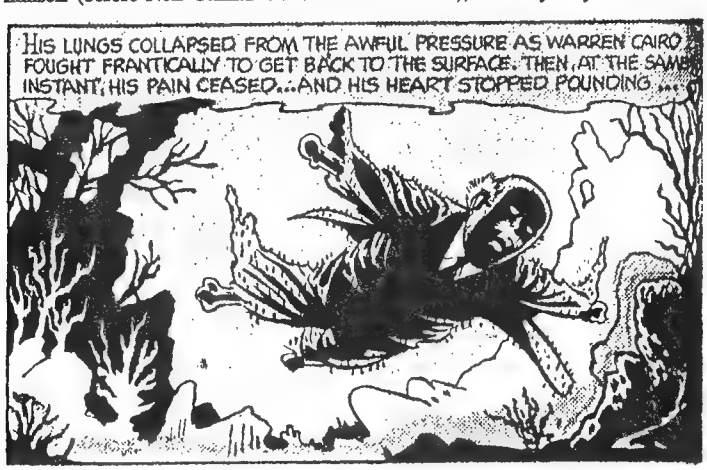
Issue #11 features a *Hansel and Gretel* parody (by Forgione and Alascia) in which the two "children" push the witch into the oven... and then set the table for dinner since they're both ghouls! It also contains a story by LOU MORALES who demonstrates that he draws some of the sexiest women to appear in Charlton's *Pre-Code Horror* lineup. This is the final *pre*-Ditko issue; fairy tale

Classic Ditko demon!

satire, a genre favored by Ditko, appears frequently in future issues.

STEVE DITKO contributes his first Charlton effort with an excellent *Cinderella* parody in **The Thing! #12** (February 1954.) (DICK AYERS, another noteworthy artist, makes his first Charlton appearance in this issue as well.) Debate has raged about what constitutes Ditko's *first* published story. Ditko himself has stated that *Stretching Things* in Ajax's **Fantastic Fears #5** (Jan-Feb 1954) was the first story he sold. (This fact courtesy of correspondent Steven Rowe, whose letter appears this issue.) However, **Overstreet** lists this as his *third* published work and credits efforts in Prize's **Black Magic #27** (Nov-Dec 53) and **#28** (Jan-Feb 53) as earlier. In any case, Ditko drew no more stories for Ajax and he left Prize after one more appearance. For the duration of the *Pre-Code* era, his efforts could be found exclusively in Charlton comics. Accordingly, Ditko joined that select group of '50s masters whose work *never* appeared in EC, along with stars like POWELL, KIRBY, EVERETT, JACK COLE, L.B.COLE, etc. I mention this to counter the biased attitude occasionally exhibited that only EC published quality material in the early 1950's.

Impressed with Ditko's abilities, Charlton assigned him the lead story in **The Thing #13**; *Library of Horror* is interesting on many levels. Ken Rolland is a horror writer whose editor, Allen Fargo (by this time, artist Al Fago had become editor of **The Thing!**), makes limitless demands upon his talent. Searching for inspiration, Rolland visits a mystic bookstore. The demonic owner offers to unlock the doors to the secret libraries, in exchange for a soul. Rolland agrees to supply the needed corpses and is provided with vivid glimpses of hell, sufficient to produce best-selling tales of horror. He becomes addicted to wealth and in the process of prowling the streets in search of innocents to slay to satisfy the perverse demon, accidentally slaughters his own fiancé, the lovely maid Marion. It turns out that the mysterious bookstore owner is *Death* himself (before Neil Gaiman transsexualized "him"); the only way to save his love is to trade his life for hers. Deciding that beautiful girls are in plentiful supply but great wealth is irreplaceable, Ken abandons his beloved and buys a seat on the New York Stock Exchange. (Only kidding, but that would have made for a more interesting twist ending.) Actually, Rollins makes the supreme sacrifice—doubly so—since Marion will have no memory of her experiences and will never know what happened to the man she loved. How *touching!*



This is good stuff. And it gets better. Ditko worked prolifically for Charlton; later issues contain as many as FIVE of his stories. Invariably, whether the subject is exotic or the deceptively mundane, they are excellent. **The Thing! #14** is an *all*-Ditko issue, including his parody of *Rumpelstiltskin*, which we presented back in **TTTTT #8.** Of even greater interest is *The Evil Eye!*, a tale of marital strife involving the fun-loving Warren and his Egyptian-born invalid wife Gerda. Warren decides to kill her in a contrived auto accident; his alibi is that he was at sea on a three-month cruise at the time of the mishap. His plot executes itself perfectly, but the ghost of Gerda appears on the luxury liner. The spooky wife brands her treacherous husband on the forehead, crippling him in the process and the ship's rats devour his arms and legs, rendering him an even greater invalid (to put it mildly.) But now comes the twist! Husband and wife both survived the car crash; Gerda is completely unharmed. However, her unfaithful spouse drowns in a puddle of water and his limbs are eaten by wild rodents—creatures so big that the local constable comments *"never saw rats that size in this area!"* Apparently, Warren's sea excursion was a hallucination brought on as an after-effect of the accident—and by the power of Gerda's evil eye!

The Thing #15 is another all-Ditko issue, this time with FIVE of his stories. *(Family Mixup,* the finale, appears in **TTTTT #7.)** This comic may be considered the *ne plus ultra* for Ditko horror collectors! It opens with *The Worm Turns,* the cover story, about a scientist who breeds a gigantic worm. At first, he feeds it rats, then sheep, and finally... *human beings!* As you may guess, the worm escapes from the lab, becomes gargantuan and succeeds in consuming every living thing on the planet. Denied of further sustenance, the monster weakens and is ultimately destroyed by the human survivors who had been able to survive as internal parasites of the worm itself. The morale, quoting The Thing: *"For man, the worm's worm, had turned at last!"*

If Looks Could Kill! is about a hypnotist with Superman-like heat vision. Merlin (frighteningly drawn with an inhumanly high Ditko-*esque* forehead) is hired by a surgeon's wife to kidnap her husband. However, Doctor Savage is blinded by the malevolent mystic and in his furious rage he is able to overpower and strangle his torturer. In a classic scene of *Pre-Code Horror,* Savage (being a surgeon, after all) operates on himself and transplants the dead hypnotist's magic eyes into his own face. (Love this line: *"An eye for an eye, they say... his for mine! I've never worked blind before but it's my only chance!")* The shining green eyes look pretty gruesome on his face, particularly with the big ugly stitches around each orb, but they still work and vengeful Doctor Savage puts them to good use burning up his unfaithful spouse. However, he forgot one important rule: guys with super-eyes should *never* stare at themselves in the mirror!

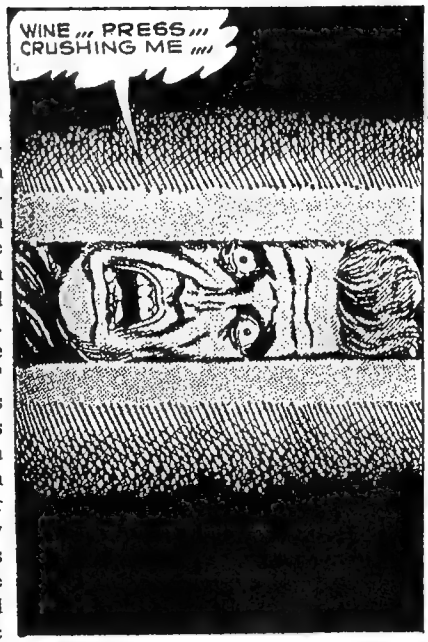
Nothing by Steve Ditko appears in **The Thing! #16.** This issue is notable for a cover credited to RUDY PALAIS, one of *Terrology's* favorite esoteric artists. (The *Palais Fan Movement* it starting to roll: *Reader*

Compare this panel to the cover of **This Magazine is Haunted #20**, in the *Cover Gallery*.

arvey entries regularly ask for more reprints of Palais stuff!) See this issue's *Cover Gallery* for further discussion. *Nothing He Couldn't Do!* is a nice Dick Ayers story which we presented last issue. **The Thing! #16** is also remarkable because of a panel in the Stan Moskowitz story *The Crusher* which was "adapted" for the cover of Charlton's **This Magazine is Haunted #20** (see *Gallery)*, which came out the very same month. Since it would have made sense to match the cover and story, one has to wonder what was distracting the editorial staff in late 1954. Hmm... perhaps, the impending Comics Code?!

Seems likely since the next issue is the *last* **Thing!**, a title which died with the Code; no attempt was made to continue the run under a different name. Like the final issue of many comic book victims of "voluntary censorship", **The Thing! #17** is a bit of an oddball—a veritable black sheep of the Charlton "family". The comic offers a Steve Ditko cover which has absolutely *nothing* to do with anything inside; a masterful effort by Dick Ayers about an oenophile (look it up!) crushed in his own wine press; two stories by DICK KIRK, an artist we have not seen before in this title; and (the best for last) one of BOB POWELL's only two contributions to the Charlton horror opus. The good news is that the Powell story is a superb 10-page ghost saga. The *bad* news is that *Weird Legend of Trelawney* is reprinted in recolored form from Fawcett's **Beware! Terror Tales #1**. Kirk's *Wishful Thinking* is *FULL* of scenes reminiscent of EC's JACK DAVIS. See the illustration below for a sample.

Strange Suspense Stories



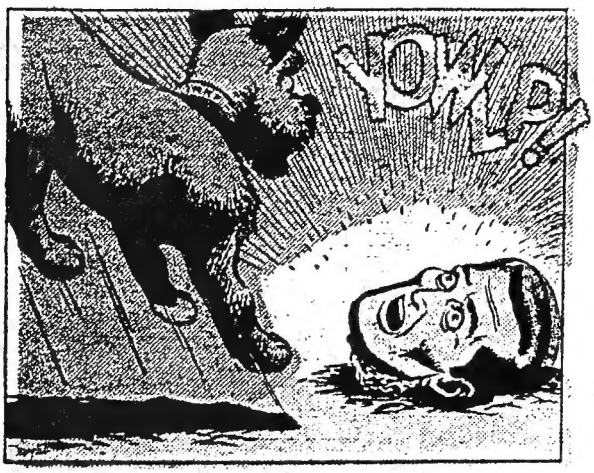
Fawcett published five comics with this title in 1952-1953. Charlton bought the name from Fawcett when that company folded its comic lineup. **Strange Suspense Stories** was "fused" with the company's own **Lawbreakers Suspense Stories**, a crime comic which had already run for 15 issues. The new magazine validates the change in title with stories devoted to the most horrific

The Kirk panel at left has a striking similarity to the Jack Davis' panel above—the latter from *Witch Witch's Witch!* in **Vault of Horror #35.** (© William M. Gaines.) The EC comic came out about six months earlier. The windswept hair is *very* characteristic of Davis.

kinds of murder, larceny and similarly extreme felonies. This title is definitely a hybrid: except for a couple of classic Ditko demons, no **Thing!**-style monsters inhabit its pages.

The Charlton version of **Strange Suspense Stories** started with #16 and ran for 7 issues in 1954. The title succumbed to the Comics Code, even though its name failed to contain any words specifically in violation of Code restrictions ("CRIME, HORROR, TERROR, WEIRD"—*familiar to EC fans?!)* **Strange Suspense Stories** became **This is Suspense** with #23; the subsequent three issues are Code-approved. By late 1955, the pressure must have let up and the comic reverted to its original title. These Code-approved comics are not only fairly boring, but well beyond the scope of *Terrology.*

Lawbreakers Suspense Stories is a crime title but it deserves a brief discussion here as the predecessor to the subsequent crime/horror hybrid, as well as because I *recommend* it to fans of wild and extreme comics. For example, **issue #10** opens with *Getting A-Head* where a drunken Harry kills his love-rival Dave and buries the body in the yard. However, reports of Dave's demise are premature: his head pokes out of the ground and starts complaining real loud! Harry chops the head off and buries it separately. But Bowser digs it up; after sleeping it off, Harry finds the gruesome noggin at the front door! In his panic, he falls down the stairs and breaks his neck. Horrible stuff even for a *crime* comic.



Bowser digs up a surprise in a horrific crime tale from **Lawbreakers Suspense Stories #10.**

It gets *"worse!"* As far as horror stories go, few "pure" horror comics have ever offered anything as terrifying as the cover story of **Lawbreakers SS #11,** a little tale whose title, *Round-Trip Ticket,* is incredibly deceiving. This is the notorious "tongues cut out" cover and story, both drawn by LOU MORALES, an artist of some skill (particularly at drawing young women). The cover scene is of a raving maniac confronting a scantily-clad beauty with a knife; clutched in the other sweaty palm may be found an assortment of human tongues. (Yeah, you read it right: human *tongues.)* His insane refrain: *"I know you are a mute, Miss Kimberly, but even if you* ***could*** *yell, the people downstairs couldn't call the police. You see... I already cut all their* ***tongues*** *out!"*

(SPOILER WARNING: WE'RE GOING TO GIVE AWAY THE SHOCK ENDING.) Sherrin Kimberly lost her voice as a child and is traveling by bus. The vehicle breaks down and, along with several other passengers, she must spend the night in a dilapidated roadside inn managed by "a most gracious host" who nonetheless looks decidely dangerous. Leading the guests to their bedrooms, the wild-eyed hotelier rudely comments on their various shortcomings: an old battleaxe talks too much; her husband doesn't make sufficient use of his tongue; a seductive beauty swindles men with her "honeyed words", etc. (Are you catching a *trend* here?) Miss Kimberly, being a mute, would appear to be inoffensive, but clearly she doesn't *need* her tongue, now does she? The young woman retires for the night but doesn't get much rest. Her sleep is repeatedly interrupted by the screams of those whose tongues are being excised without benefit of anesthetic! The maniac gets to her last: *"Miss Kimberly... you have nothing to worry about! Didn't the doctors say that a great shock might bring your voice back? Fate is kind... it has removed from the people below... that which they misused... their tongues!"* Well, the shock works... and the reader is shocked as well, since it turns out that Miss Kimberly fell asleep in the bus station and *dreamed* the entire story. Her voice has returned—a *happy* ending! Okay, okay, the ending *is* a cop-out; but it's hard to imagine even a *Pre-Code* comics company presenting a story this gruesome, especially as the cover feature, without trying to dilute the impact somehow. (Compare the exploding *(robot)* head on Harvey's **Tomb of Terror #15.** And even Bill Gaines drew the line at showing the bloody stumps of decapitated necks!)

The last **issue, #15,** contains *Grounds for Murder,* a buried alive story which, complete with creepy panels depicting cemeteries, coffins, bats and spiders, could easily have appeared in a horror comic. Clearly, Charlton was testing the waters for evolving this crime title into one devoted to the horror genre.

Strange Suspense Stories #s 16 & 17 consist almost exclusively of artwork by Dick Giordano, along with a couple of nice efforts by Dick Ayers, an artist whose style is reminiscent of Bob Powell but well worth enjoying for its own merits. The comics abound with murders by various uncomfortable methods: strangulation, drowning, auto "accident", poisoning, bombing, etc. *Especially* the last; someone in power at Charlton must have had an explosives fixation. Compare a couple of classic bomb covers: **Lawbreakers SS #10** in this *Gallery* and Ditko's **Racket Squad in Action #12** on the back cover. Actually, this latter long-lived title, which we can't even attempt to discuss here, is packed with mob

rubouts using various incendiary and percussive devices.

The *"strange"* in these suspense stories arrives with Steve Ditko starting with **issue #18.** *What was in Sam Dora's Box?* is the question people ask of Sam, who is never seen about town without a large box resting on one shoulder. Everybody in town wonders what secret Dora possesses but Zach Marrow has become *obsessed* with the mystery. Driven to a mad rage by his curiosity (kinda like an insane 1960's Lois Lane), he actually attacks and kills the poor box owner. But what he discovers is so frightening he jumps out a window to his death! What *is* the secret of Sam Dora's box? Well, we'd tell you but there's not enough space. Sorry.

Strange Suspense Stories #20's lone Ditko tale is entitled *Von Mohl versus the Ants!* Regular readers of this magazine will recognize YET ANOTHER takeoff on the Charlton Heston movie "about the arrogant great white hunter who must protect his jungle estate from marauding army ants." The film was called *The Naked Jungle*. Apparently it must have had quite an impact on 1950's comic writers since this is at least the fourth comic story "inspired" by the hit flick. In Ditko's version, the plantation owner uses burning oil and dynamite (yet more explosions!) to fend off the insect hordes. However, the ants outsmart him by tunneling *under* the inferno!

(Okay, okay, drop that Bic: no poison pen letters, please. Here's Sam's secret. Turns out that Sam Dora was *born with two heads.* His exposed one is no hot shakes but not nearly as ugly as the alien monstrosity hidden inside the box.)

The flood of Ditko artwork vanishes almost as quickly as it appeared; as with **The Thing!,** the last two issues of SSS offer one lonely Ditko cover and nothing more. JOE SHUSTER has a tale in each comic. **Issue #22** contains the most interesting piece, *Killer's Arms*. Signed by WINIK & OSRIN (a pair of artists unknown to me), it's the story of one Professor Morton, who is developing a grafting serum which will allow replacement of his missing arm with a limb from a gorilla. Traveling to Africa in company with his daughter and her handsome fiancé, Jonathan Clark, the scientist searches for suitable monkey material. Unfortunately, Tongo, *"the most feared man-killing gorilla in the African jungle"*, finds them

Even in *Pre-Code Horror* comics, some subjects were taboo and could only be addressed obliquely. Robert Louis Stevenson had the *same* problem in 1886...

first. Anticipating the professor's plan with his savvy animal instincts, Tongo attacks, *ripping both arms* off the unfortunate assistant! Morton succeeds in belatedly gunning down the angry ape. His dismay is ameliorated by golden scientific opportunity: in front of him may be found both a man in need and a suitable pair of ape appendages! Making liberal use of his grafting serum, Morton transplants the limbs successfully onto Jonathan, who makes a prompt recovery (surprisingly so when we consider that this major surgery takes place in a steaming jungle!) Problem is that the serum has a peculiar side effect: it transforms the rest of Jonathan's body into ape form. The new man-ape slaughters the scientist and carries the helpless female off into his jungle domain. After all, they *are* engaged. Okay, it's not a *great* horror story but it does have a laugh or two!

A title change takes place now and appearing in the beginning of 1955 is **This is Suspense #23.** This "filler" issue is a complete reprinting of Fox's **A Star Presentation #3** from May 1950. The core of this comic is a retelling of Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde*, drawn by Wally Wood and Harry Harrison. The same pages were also reprinted in Star's **Startling Terror Tales #10** (May 1952). Don't ask me why or how this story ended up in three different *Pre-Code Horror* comics from a trio of publishers. It's *early* Wood and not that great; the best line comes from a euphemistically-labeled "flowermaid of the evening": *"Indulge in a bit of ecstacy, Gent? My blossoms are long lasting!"*

The short Code-approved run of **This is Suspense** is interesting for an incredibly insipid assortment of "suspense" covers: one was reprinted in **TTTTT #8** and another in this issue's *Gallery*. **Issue #24** consists entirely of censored reprints from Fawcett *Pre-Code Horror* comics, including two by George Evans. **Strange Suspense Stories** returns as the title with #27 and this cover is another classic of Comics Code-spawned emasculation: the "suspense" here lies in that the label has washed off the hero's medicine bottle (!) (See **Extinct! #1's** *Gallery.)* The title continued for another fifty installments until 1969 containing dozens of Steve Ditko stories. Few of these exhibit the fire and spirit of Ditko's *Pre-Code* work, but they're still of interest. Being Code-approved, these comics are beyond the scope of this article.

This Magazine is Haunted

Charlton also bought this title from Fawcett and the numerical run here is quite straightforward: Charlton continued the series with the next number, **issue #15** appearing in early 1954. (Charlton sometimes referred to just **Haunted** as the title but the indicia includes all *four* words. **Haunted** all by itself is the name of a post-Code Charlton comic published in the '70s.) Curiously, Charlton kept some of Fawcett's editorial "style", including the text bar above the opening splash page. Fawcett's horror host, Doctor Death, is also retained; however some hesitation may be seen here since the character's face is obviously redrawn for the cover and related story in **issue #15.** The unnamed emcee appears as something of a cross between Dr. Death and Fawcett's Mummy horror host. *The Corpse in the House* is a neat EC-style tale of vicious murder and supernatural revenge all taking place in the realm of misleadingly inoffensive suburban domesticity. Tom Mason and Gil Haggard are partners in the building trade. Tom is helping Gil construct his new house. Gil plans to live there with his lovely fiancée, Paula. Tom likes Paula too and Gil makes the big mistake of teasing him about his infatuation. Lickety-split, Tom tosses his partner into the cement mixer. It'll be poetic justice, he muses, for Gil to spend eternity as part of the ceilings of his own dream domicile! Paula despairs that her fiancé has abandoned her and she falls easily into Tom's reassuring arms. She wants to get married in the living room of the lovely new house. (Bad move, Tom! Never *ever* live in a building in which you've hidden a body!) Tom is uncomfortable with this, particularly when "spectral blood" begins to drip from the ceiling onto his fancy wedding suit. But he toughs it out. However, the ghost of Gil doesn't stop here. Just as the justice intones *"let him speak now or forever hold his peace",* Gil's rotten remains come tumbling out of the ceiling, driving the already panic-stricken groom to confess his crime. (Don't ask me how Gil's skeleton ended up plastered—*intact*—into the ceiling. That's horrific poetic license for ya!)

STEVE DITKO's first appearance is in **This Magazine is Haunted #16,** with a superb cover effort (see back cover) illustrating the story *The Last Voyage of the Sea Witch!* The story, *not* by Ditko, deals with the slave trade. Comic writers seem particularly fascinated with the gruesome fact that slave traders, when intercepted by naval authorities, would toss their live cargo overboard to drown all chained together. BERNIE KRIGSTEIN drew a story for an EC science fiction comic in which the traders are later captured by aliens who (of course—turnabout is fair play, eh?) are approached by the "galactic authorities" and dispose of their cargo in the analogous manner. (Were all these stories inspired by a popular movie or book from the era? *Readers?)* The rest of this comic has a heavy Fawcett "flavor"; one wonders if Charlton purchased a supply of original art along with a couple of comic titles. Answer shortly...

Issue #17 is a feast of fine artwork, featuring a Ditko cover and three great stories to go along with a nice Bob Powell piece, *Will to Kill,* featuring some nice auto action (Powell was a car buff.) I suspect this was an inventory story acquired from Fawcett, since Powell did no other *original* work for Charlton. Ditko's *3-D Disaster Doom Earth!* (sic) deals with the then very "hot" subject of three-dimensional media; in particular, 3-D movies. It's hard for modern fans to comprehend the craze of 3-D when it was introduced in 1952 in comic books. But like all fads, the 3-D craze died as fast as it came and left a lot of comic companies in financial straits *(not* Charlton, which never joined the 3-D "bandwagon":) after investing lots of money in tooling up to produce expensive 3-D comics. This tale hints at the insanity of 3-D mania: it's about a movie star who sells his soul to the devil in order to star in the "ultimate" 3-D film. The movie is so spectacular that "real blood" drips from the screen and the film monster emerges and brutally slays the audience—including the star who makes the mistake of watching the preview— with Satan, who attends to collect his debt!

Extreme violence becomes common in Charlton horror by 1954. From Moskowitz's *Valley of Shadows!* in **TMiH #18.**

My suspicions about Fawcett "inventory" is confirmed with **issue #18;** the story *Caretaker of the Dead!* appears complete with an introduction by the Fawcett horror host, The Mummy. It appeared originally in that company's **Beware! Terror Tales #1** under the slightly different title, *Custodian of the Dead!* (Charlton, at least, did a better job of *coloring* it!) Ditko drew only the cover of the comic, a scene which relates to the lead story—referred to as *The Last Earl!* by Doctor Death but introduced as *The Bottom of the Swamp!* in the opening splash. Apparently, a certain degree of confusion reigned with this Charlton title as the Comics Code approached!

"Injury-to-eye" panel (per Overstreet) from **TMiH #19.** Have *you* ever met an "injury-to-eye" collector?

Ditko is credited with only the cover of **TMiH #19;** I say "credited" because it is *not* signed (which is unusual) and doesn't look much like Ditko. Of course, the scene, featuring a headless Doctor Death, doesn't lend itself to recognition of art style. I defer to the popular opinion on this one but ask if readers agree?

Issues #19 through 21 all contain one story apiece reprinted with new coloring from Fawcett's **This Magazine is Haunted #1.** (That comic contained only three stories—they're all quite long—meaning that the *entire* issue was reprinted!) The tale in **issue #21** is by GEORGE EVANS. **Issues #20 & #21** feature covers by STANLEY MOSKOWITZ (swiped from the panel in **The Thing #17,** discussed earlier) and Ditko (a well-executed voodoo curse scene.) Each issue also has a story by Kirk, both very reminiscent of Jack Davis. The unsigned *The Curse of the Odyssey!* in **TMiH #20** triggered vivid flashbacks in my mind to EC horror comics as I studied the character poses and panel layouts. The best story in both numbers is **issue #20's** *The Monument* (Dick Ayers), about a hunchback in medieval times who becomes wealthy through thievery but is unable to steal the respect of the beautiful Bianca. Hoping to buy her love, he contributes vast sums to build an enormous bell tower for the town's church. The tower turns out to be in Pisa, Italy... and well, the inhabitants are horrified when they see how the leaning edifice has "defaced" their city. Not a *great* plot, but the artwork is really nice. Ayers art is not always listed in **Overstreet** and this is a mistake: his stories are generally topnotch.

The *Pre-Code* run of **This Magazine is Haunted** died with the Comics Code. The title changed to **Danger and Adventure** with **issue #22** and lasted for six mediocre issues as an action/super-hero combo. The title was revived briefly for five Code-approved installments in 1957-58. While several contain Ditko stories, they are but pale caricatures of what had once been!

So ended the Charlton *Pre-Code Horror* era. As the publishers went, Charlton's output fell in the middle range in terms of quantity. But from a quality standpoint, the company's production was definitely above-average. While artwork by Steve Ditko and Dick Ayers contributes heavily to that high rating, even without their efforts, I would rate Charlton a *Pre-Code Horror* purveyor worthy of the serious fan's attention.

Next issue, we take a look at **AVON COMICS,** a company with a small but distinct and special output of *Pre-Code Horror* comics, including many nice covers. Since Avon's production was limited, we'll be able to provide a detailed overview. Watch for **TERROLOGY #12** in about two months!

Ditko Pre-Code Charlton Checklist

The Thing! #12 (c,1), 13 (c,3), 14 (c,4), 15 (c,5), 17 (c)
Strange Suspense Stories #18 (c,2), 19 (c,1), 20 (c,2), 22 (c)
This Magazine is Haunted 16(c), 17(c,3), 18 (c,1), 19 (c), 21 (c)
c=cover. #=#stories. Ditko drew 14 covers and 22 stories for Charlton Pre-Code Horror. Not a clunker in the bunch!

Wanted: Dead or Alive

Yes, we're still looking for "proof" that these comics exist. The best proof would be an *actual* copy. But we'd also be interested in other documentation which might shed light on why these comics are listed in Overstreet or Gerber such as house ads, mentions in letter columns, etc.

SUPERIOR	Adventure into Fear #1 (1951)
STORY	Dark Mysteries #25 (1955)
AJAX	The Flame #4 (1955)
ACE	Hand of Fate #26 (1955)
GREEN	Liberty Comics #4,5 (1945)
ST.JOHN	Nightmare #4 (1953)
AJAX	Police Thrills #1 (1954)
Conde-Nast	Supersnipe Comics #13 (1944)

The arsonist adds murder to his repertoire, in *Matchless Firebug!*, by the matchless Dick Ayers, in **SSS #18.**